

A Multidimensional Interpretation of Resilience in Foreign Language Learning: Theoretical Integration and Developmental Approaches

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Abstract: This study systematically elucidates the multidimensional attributes of resilience in foreign language learning. By integrating three theoretical dimensions—individual psychology, sociocultural factors, and situational interaction—it reveals the complex mechanisms underlying its development. This study indicates that: 1) The individual psychological dimension emphasizes the core driving role of the self-system (self-efficacy, goal orientation) and the strategy system (metacognitive strategies, emotional regulation); 2) The sociocultural dimension focuses on the structural empowerment of relational networks (teacher/peer support) and cultural capital (family background, values); and 3) The situational interaction dimension elucidates the dynamic adaptation process between environmental stressors (language difficulty, evaluation anxiety) and technological mediating environments (online interaction). Current research faces core controversies including “overemphasis on individual agency”, “questions about cross-cultural universality”, and “lack of dynamic measurement”. Future efforts should build resilience ecosystem models, develop culturally embedded assessment tools, deepen technology-enabled pathways, and advance resilience-oriented curriculum redesign.

Keywords—foreign language learning resilience; multidimensional interpretation; psychosocial integration model; dynamic adaptation; cultural contextuality

1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst the dual waves of globalization and educational digitization, foreign language learning has become a core competency for individual cross-cultural survival. However, issues such as high language anxiety, cultural identity conflicts, and cognitive overload have led many learners to fall into “learned helplessness”. Traditional pedagogical research often centers on optimizing teaching methods or curricula while overlooking learners’ capacity for self-repair and adaptation when facing challenges—that is, “foreign language learning resilience.” This concept transcends simplistic assumptions about innate talent, representing instead a dynamic adaptive system shaped by the interplay of individual traits, social support, and environmental pressures.

Current research faces the challenge of insufficient theoretical integration: the psychological paradigm focuses on individual stress-coping traits, the sociological paradigm emphasizes structural support forces, while situational cognitive theory concentrates on environmental moderation processes (Medintsev, 2024). Relying solely on any single dimension leads to a fragmented understanding of resilience-building mechanisms. For instance, overemphasizing individual effort may obscure the systemic constraints imposed by unequal cultural capital on learners in remote areas; conversely, attributing resilience solely to social support risks overlooking the critical value of proactive individual coping strategies.

The genealogy of resilience research profoundly reflects the complexity of its development. Early psychological perspectives, dominated by trait theories, focused on

identifying traits like “grit” or “resilience” that promote successful language acquisition (e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007). This approach internalized resilience, offering observable behavioral and psychological variables (e.g., Satici, 2016). However, this orientation is prone to falling into the trap of individualizing learning difficulties, inadvertently downplaying the context of structural inequality. The contribution of the sociological orientation lies in revealing the foundational role of “social capital” and “cultural capital” in shaping foreign language learning opportunities and resilience (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986). Research indicates that learners from marginalized communities or resource-deprived environments face fundamental obstacles to resilience-building due to disadvantages in accessing “symbolic power” (Norton, 2013), reminding us that discussing individual willpower in isolation from class, race, and institutional factors is incomplete. Contextual cognitivists emphasize how resilience “emerges” through dynamic interactions with the environment. They contend that learners’ dynamic adaptive behaviors—such as employing metacognitive strategies, seeking feedback, and utilizing cognitive scaffolding—are stimulated and cultivated within specific learning environments (e.g., online collaborative spaces), cultural contexts (e.g., learning group norms), and social interactions (e.g., Oxford, 2017; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). While each theoretical strand offers valuable insights, they collectively contribute to a fragmented, “blind men and the elephant” understanding of the same phenomenon: the psychological strand emphasizes the “individual engine” as the fundamental driver; the sociological perspective analyzes the “structural tracks” that shape pathways; and the situational cognitive approach focuses on the “interactive regulatory system” at work. This fragmentation urgently requires integration to form a systemic picture of how

resilience evolves within its true ecological niche—that is, through the mutual construction of individual agency, the tensions between social structural empowerment/constraints, and the demands of immediate contexts (Ushioda, 2019).

Therefore, the “multidimensional integrated interpretation” proposed in this study strives to engage in theoretical dialogue and reconstruction within an intersectionality framework. Its core lies in dissolving the opposition between dimensions and constructing a dynamic model of resilience emerging from the interaction between the individual, society, and environment (e.g., Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). This requires not only identifying dimensional elements (e.g., individual-level emotional regulation strategies, societal-level teacher/peer support networks, environmental-level task difficulty and cultural contexts), but also exploring how these elements mutually embed, compete, synergize, or compromise to collectively shape complex learning stress response patterns (Ushioda, 2019). Critical reflection is paramount: we must guard against the temptation to establish singular resilience “prescriptions” or standardized measurements (e.g., Segerstrom et al., 2017), while also critically examining the cultural centrism inherent in prevailing theories. Current mainstream research is largely rooted in Western individualistic contexts, where emphasized traits like open expression and self-efficacy may struggle to align with the complex discursive realities of Chinese foreign language learners within collectivist cultures (e.g., Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). Furthermore, emerging research frontiers are central to this paper’s focus. For instance, neuroeducation seeks to uncover biological links between stress and learning performance, while the new mobilities paradigm explores how digital platforms’ global connectivity provides fresh cultural supports and challenges for resilience. Building upon systematic review, integrative interpretation, and critical reflection, this paper explores how these core concepts can effectively anchor future foreign language learning practices and research landscapes within a technology-driven globalization context. It aims to provide theoretical support and methodological suggestions for constructing a resilient theoretical framework characterized by greater ecological validity, cultural inclusivity, and practical guidance.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical construction of resilience in foreign language learning requires transcending disciplinary boundaries. By integrating sociocultural theory, dynamic systems theory, and the bioecological model, it reveals the dynamic, hierarchical nature of resilience. Firstly, based on Vygotsky’s (1978) Mediation Theory, resilience emerges from interactions between individuals and cultural tools (such as linguistic symbols and digital platforms). “Situating scaffolding” provided by teachers or high-level peers can facilitate the intergenerational transmission of psychological functions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Secondly, de Bot et al. (2007) emphasize resilience as a nonlinear “attractor state” within their linguistic dynamic systems model: Learners’

motivation, anxiety, and strategy use reconfigure adaptive equilibrium through self-organization following perturbations (e.g., cultural conflicts, exam failures). This process is governed by sensitivity to initial conditions (“butterfly effect”) and system openness (Papi & Hiver, 2020). Ultimately, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory posits that resilience is embedded within the interactions of macro-, meso-, and micro-systems—from micro-system classroom teacher-student empathy (teachers’ emotional support as a “proximal process”) to macro-system multilingual policy environments (e.g., the EU’s multilingualism strategy). Resources across these levels influence resilience trajectories through cross-system resonance.

The key to theoretical synergy lies in clarifying the dialectical relationship between agency and structure. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) views resilience as the transcendence of adversity through self-efficacy, yet this must be examined within structural constraints: Bourdieu’s (1991) theory of cultural capital warns that stratified distribution of linguistic resources (such as bilingual upbringing in elite families) may reproduce inequalities in resilience; while Norton’s (2013) Investment Theory reveals how learners reconstruct power relations through “counter-practices.” In response, Ushioda (2019) proposes the Person-in-Context Relational View, arguing that resilience emerges as “situated agency”—individuals activate resilience triggers (e.g., cross-cultural mentoring) within their environment through intentional engagement (e.g., self-directed planning of immersive learning projects), thereby achieving resilient transgressions within structural constraints. (e.g., autonomously designing immersive learning projects) activate resilience triggers within the environment (e.g., cross-cultural mentoring), thereby achieving resilient transgressions within structural constraints (Miller & Gkonou, 2018).

3. MULTIDIMENSIONAL INTERPRETATION OF RESILIENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

3.1 Individual Psychological Dimension

The individual psychological dimension is the most central and deeply rooted layer within the structure of foreign language learning resilience. It focuses on learners’ internal emotional, cognitive, volitional, and belief systems, analyzing the inner resilience and dynamic adaptability they exhibit when confronting the unique complexities, uncertainties, and potential setbacks inherent in foreign language learning—such as persistent comprehension difficulties, expression barriers, cultural gaps, and anxiety over negative evaluations. In resilience development, learners are not passive recipients; their intrinsic psychological qualities and agency play a decisive role in overcoming obstacles and sustaining motivation. This dimension can be interpreted through several key aspects:

Firstly, core psychological traits form the foundation of resilience (Holling, 1973). Among these, self-efficacy plays a pivotal role. Learners’ belief in their ability to successfully

accomplish specific foreign language tasks directly influences their persistence and willingness to try strategies when facing challenges. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to perceive difficulty as controllable and demonstrate greater resilience after setbacks. Attribution style is another critical variable. Learners who attribute academic success or failure (even temporary setbacks) to controllable (effort, strategy application), unstable (opportunity, temporary state), and internal (personal agency) factors are more likely to maintain resilience and motivation. Conversely, attributing failure to uncontrollable, stable, external factors (such as insufficient language aptitude or poor teaching) can lead to learned helplessness, eroding the foundations of resilience. Achievement goal orientation profoundly shapes resilience: Learners with a mastery goal orientation prioritize skill development and knowledge understanding itself, viewing challenges as learning opportunities and demonstrating greater perseverance and intrinsic motivation (Miller et al., 2021). Conversely, those overly focused on performance goals (such as outperforming others or avoiding perceived shortcomings) may be more prone to discouragement and abandonment when facing public setbacks. Furthermore, positive implicit beliefs (such as “language ability is malleable”) and optimistic expectations are equally vital resilience traits that sustain persistent effort.

Secondly, dynamic psychological processes reflect the operation of resilience. Language learning involves numerous unpredictable situations and emotional fluctuations, making emotional regulation crucial (Wang et al., 2024). Resilient learners effectively recognize and accept negative emotions like anxiety and frustration arising during study. They flexibly employ strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (e.g., reframing challenges as growth opportunities) and situational management (e.g., avoiding high-pressure communication environments) to channel and transform these feelings. This maintains emotional equilibrium, preventing emotional overwhelm from disrupting learning actions. This is closely linked to robust willpower and self-regulation—particularly when intrinsic motivation fluctuates or external temptations arise. Resilient individuals activate conscious volitional control by setting clear sub-goals, reminding themselves of learning's value, managing attention resources, and blocking distractions. This transforms learning intent into sustained action.

Furthermore, the psychological application of resilience strategies is a key mechanism. The psychological dimension ultimately manifests as the proactive mobilization of mental resources and coping approaches during adversity. This includes effective metacognitive monitoring and strategy adjustment: highly resilient learners adeptly track their learning states and strategy effectiveness, enabling swift reflection (“Is my current approach ineffective?”) and adaptive adjustments (e.g., exploring new input sources or altering practice formats) when facing challenges. The intrinsic willingness to proactively seek support (rather than equating asking for help with incompetence) is another vital

psychological strategy. Moreover, positive self-talk and motivational internal narratives provide crucial internal support during difficult moments.

In summary, the individual psychological dimension constitutes the core domain of endogenous motivation for resilience in foreign language learning. It is grounded in learners' specific and relatively stable psychological traits of resilience—self-efficacy, positive attribution, and mastery goal orientation. Through actively mobilizing psychological processes such as emotional regulation and volitional control to cope with stress impacts, it ultimately flexibly employs strategic mechanisms like metacognitive reflection, resource seeking, and positive self-narratives to restore learning trajectories or achieve adaptive adjustments. These internal psychological elements interact and synergize, empowering individuals to traverse “learning troughs” and pursue foreign language mastery amid fluctuations.

3.2 Sociocultural Dimension

Foreign Language Learning Resilience does not emerge or develop in a psychological vacuum; rather, it is deeply embedded within learners' social networks, cultural contexts, and the interactive practices they engage in. The sociocultural dimension examines how external environments shape, support, and (at times) challenge individual resilience. It emphasizes that resilience is not merely an expression of internal qualities but a product of the interplay between social interactions, cultural values, and institutional structures. This dimension reveals how learners acquire resources, meaning, and strength through dynamic negotiations with others and their environment to withstand setbacks and sustain learning. Its key aspects can be interpreted as follows:

First of all, social contexts serve as incubators and testing grounds for resilience. Interactive practices and emotional support constitute the cornerstone of the sociocultural dimension. Effective teacher-student interactions within the classroom—such as patient corrective feedback, creating safe spaces for expression, and acknowledging the learning process—significantly enhance learners' sense of efficacy and willingness to take risks while reducing anxiety. Higher levels of teacher emotional support, including understanding learners' struggles and emotions, expressing genuine encouragement and high expectations, form a robust psychological safety net that serves as a crucial buffer against setbacks. Peer interactions are equally pivotal: Mutual-support relationships among peers—such as sharing resources, collaborating on problem-solving, and exchanging experiences—not only provide substantive academic assistance but also offer emotional validation and a sense of belonging. This fosters the perception that one is “not fighting alone,” reinforcing a collective belief in overcoming challenges. Conversely, environments marked by excessive competition, social isolation, or critical exclusion erode the very foundations of resilience.

Secondly, the deep-seated influence of cultural values and expectations. Cultural backgrounds shape individuals' beliefs about language learning, preferences for goal-setting, and frameworks for interpreting adversity. Certain collectivist cultures may emphasize core values like perseverance and diligence, fostering a fundamental tendency to persist in the face of challenges (such as the widespread endorsement of "hard work compensates for lack of talent" in East Asian contexts). However, cultural influence carries dual effects. While the concept of "face" is highly sensitive in certain cultural contexts, and some researchers suggest it may drive individuals to exert greater effort to avoid "losing face" (positive motivation), the more prevalent view is that excessive anxiety about "mistakes" or public "failure"—leading to heightened "face-threat sensitivity"—can significantly inhibit willingness to attempt oral practice. This becomes a cultural psychological barrier to resilient behaviors like proactive engagement and adventurous expression. Family/community values and expectations regarding language learning also constitute crucial variables: strong value endorsement coupled with moderate expectations (not excessive pressure) can provide powerful psychological motivation; conversely, excessive, instrumentally rational pressure may lead to avoidance anxiety or a loss of perceived value.

Moreover, the enabling role of structured resources and symbolic networks. Maintaining resilience hinges on accessible social support systems. Family support is indispensable in areas such as financial investment (e.g., purchasing learning materials, supporting overseas experiences), emotional understanding (e.g., accepting temporary setbacks), and creating conducive learning environments (e.g., providing quiet spaces). Institutional infrastructure and systemic arrangements—including high-quality library resources, flexible language corner activities, tutoring center services, and inclusive assessment strategies—offer material and institutional safeguards for resilience practices. Particularly noteworthy are opportunities to engage with communities of practice: integration into target language communities (whether offline neighborhoods or online forums) exposes learners to authentic linguistic environments, immerses them in cultural appeal, fosters identity-based motivation, and provides a practice-feedback loop for language use. This significantly enhances the sense of purpose and sustained motivation for lifelong learning. At the symbolic level, a positive linguistic ideology environment—such as societal recognition of multilingualism's value and dismantling biases around target language "superiority"—reduces learners' psychological burdens, fostering freedom in learning and a sense of belonging. Contemporary online virtual spaces offer powerful platforms for building resilience, enabling learners to transcend geographical constraints in seeking peer support, sharing resources, and learning from exemplary narratives, thereby forming resilient distributed mutual-aid networks.

In summary, the sociocultural dimension deconstructs the external generation mechanisms and ecological interdependence of foreign language learning resilience. It emphasizes that resilience is the dynamic outcome of continuous interactive negotiation between the learner as a subject and their relational network—composed of multi-level actors (teachers, peers, family, community)—as well as the environment shaped by specific cultural beliefs and social institutions. Positive interactions (emotional support, effective scaffolding), proactive cultural value infusion (e.g., valuing diligence, providing appropriate incentives), open and inclusive social environments, and accessible resource networks collectively weave a resilient framework enabling learners to overcome adversities in language acquisition. Understanding and optimizing these sociocultural factors is essential for building a more inclusive, supportive, and resilient foreign language education ecosystem.

3.3 Contextual Interaction Dimension

Resilience in foreign language learning depends not only on individual intrinsic traits but is also deeply embedded within the dynamic interactions of sociocultural contexts. This dimension emphasizes how learners activate, adapt, and reconstruct their resilience resources through sustained engagement with their physical environment, social networks, and cultural contexts (Ushioda, 2019). Contextual factors encompass formal teaching settings (e.g., classroom task design, teacher feedback), informal language exposure (e.g., cross-cultural social interactions, digital media use), and macro-policy environments (e.g., bilingual education systems, study abroad support frameworks). Resilience manifests as learners' dynamic capacity to respond to contextual pressures: for instance, maintaining expressive willingness under high-pressure classroom correction (Pekrun et al., 2017) or invoking strategies to rebuild communication during cross-cultural conflicts (Jackson, 2020). Notably, contexts serve as arenas for active practice—learners' "structured behaviors" such as proactively joining language partner communities or adjusting virtual language learning environment parameters reflect mechanisms for collaboratively constructing resilience pathways with their environment (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The essence of contextual interaction lies in the mediating transformation of resources. Sociocultural theory reveals that resilience stems from the process of internalizing external support—such as teacher scaffolding and peer encouragement—into psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Empirical research indicates that highly resilient learners excel at creating "resilient niches": gaining emotional belonging through immersive language communities (Norton, 2013), developing "third space" identity negotiation skills in multicultural practices (Kramsch, 1995), or transforming social marginality into opportunities for critical linguistic reflection (Canagarajah, 2013). The challenge and support of contexts exist in a dialectical relationship: moderate communicative pressure can stimulate strategy innovation (Oxford, 2017), but prolonged structural exclusion (such as

language discrimination) depletes resilience resources. This necessitates that educational designers move beyond individualized interventions to systematically optimize the “contextual resilience layer,” such as establishing cross-cultural mentoring networks or implementing flexible assessment systems.

4. FUTURE PATHWAYS: TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES IN RESILIENCE EDUCATION

The multidimensional nature of resilience in foreign language learning demands that educational practices systematically transcend traditional “single-dimensional intervention” approaches, shifting toward a trans-level integration paradigm for resilience cultivation. Future pathways must adopt an ecological holistic perspective to integrate neural, psychological, social, and contextual dimensions, constructing a dynamically adaptive framework (Ungar, 2018). The core lies in designing a “resilience scaffolding system”: at the micro-classroom level, develop neuroplasticity training modules (e.g., mindful language meditation) to optimize emotional regulation (Zhao, 2021); At the contextual interaction level, create cultural reverberation spaces through digital narrative communities and cross-school virtual language partner programs to help learners transform marginalized language experiences into resilience capital (Darvin & Norton, 2023). Crucially, establish resilience diagnosis-feedback loop mechanisms. Utilize multimodal learning analytics technologies (e.g., eye-tracking, affective computing) to capture real-time resilience fluctuation nodes and generate personalized intervention prescriptions (Hiver et al., 2021), achieving a paradigm shift from “stress-responsive repair” to “preventive empowerment.”

The essence of subversive practice lies in deconstructing the domination of resilience resources by power structures. This necessitates reconstructing the educational ecosystem in three dimensions: Firstly, implementing critical resilience literacy curricula to guide students in dismantling linguistic ideological barriers and developing symbolic resistance capabilities against hegemonic discourses (Pennycook & Rand, 2021); Secondly, implement institutional resilience redesign by encouraging universities to establish multilingual crisis support networks (e.g., language trauma intervention teams for international students), reform high-stakes standardized testing (e.g., adding resilience developmental assessment dimensions), and dismantle structural violence (Celbis et al., 2025); Thirdly, build resilience justice alliances to integrate informal learning networks like community language practices into resilience resource pools. This ultimately achieves a qualitative shift from individual adaptability to collective transformative power (Phan & Le, 2023), positioning resilience education as an engine for sociolinguistic justice rather than a lubricant for systemic oppression.

5. CONCLUSION

Research on resilience in foreign language learning has moved beyond the myth of “individual willpower.” Its complexity manifests in three dimensions: psychological drives require sustained ignition through social networks; strategic systems gain meaning within cultural contexts; and all adaptive behaviors ultimately converge on dynamic adjustments to situational pressures. The core value of multidimensional interpretation lies in revealing that there is no abstract, universal “secret formula for resilience”. Instead, it requires understanding how specific learners weave their own “networks of resistance” within their cultural coordinates and environmental constraints. Future resilience education practices must transcend three illusions: the cultural illusion of viewing Western models as standard answers, the instrumental illusion of believing technology can solve everything, and the individualistic illusion of neglecting institutional reform. Ultimately, on the thorny path of foreign language learning, resilience is not merely the capacity to emerge from adversity but a political practice of rebuilding equitable educational ecosystems—where every learner’s “right to resilient growth” receives institutional protection. Resilience cultivation without supportive social structures inevitably devolves into a neoliberal myth, serving as the profound warning multidimensional resilience theory offers to educational reform.

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