

EFL Learning Through Positive Psychology : University Students' Viewpoints

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at discovering students' perspectives regarding the positive psychology theory and their English learning process. This descriptive study employed questionnaire and interview guidelines in collecting the data. The participants of this study are five English Education study Program students in one of the universities in Subang, West Java. The collected data were then analyzed by recording and interpreting. It is unearthed that all participants apply positive psychology during their English learning process, yet the strategies they utilize in applying it are diverse. However, some of them are still struggling with challenges in learning English. It is expected that this study can provide additional literature for those who are concerned with the psychology aspect of learning English as a Foreign Language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Positive Psychology (PP) is one of the many branches of Psychology. It was first declared by (Seligman, 1998). He was the first President of the American Psychological Association in the early 1990 and the founder of Positive Psychology. The psychology of humanism, whose discussion centers on happiness and meaning, is where the history of positive psychology has its roots. Studies of meaning and happiness have exploded and become well-known among followers of positive psychology since the field's inception including in education. Seligman in his book entitled *Learned Optimism* which was first published in 1990 classifies ways of interpreting events into two parts; optimistic and pessimistic. Seligman characterizes optimism with the following three indicators: (i) Interpreting bad events as permanent or not, (ii) Interpreting bad events as specific or diffuse and (iii) Interpreting adverse events as external or internal.

Interpreting bad events as permanent or not must also be owned by students in understanding and learning English. Where in their hard work, they must be able to have a point of view that the problems or obstacles they face in learning English are temporary. Many of the learners think that English is a difficult language to learn, in addition to the use of English in Indonesia both within the school and social community being a language that is rarely used so that it gradually creates a "Mental Block" paradigm that makes them

tend to avoid difficulties. Not to mention, the presence of a bunch of Grammar Nazis who comment too much on beginners' English mistakes which further reduces the confidence of learners to communicate in English. Oktaviani (2013) also declared that fear of others' negative judgment is the most impactful component of students' anxiety in learning English, followed by communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and finally anxiety over being in an English class.

In addition, Seligman (2011) provides the PERMA model by providing an increasingly extensive view of wealth. Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement are all acronyms for PERMA. Although the language exercises from the section on positive brain research on language about a specific aspect of a positive feeling, they also reflect various aspects of the PERMA model. Seligman (2018) hypothesized that Positive emotion (P), engagement in activities that draw on one's character strengths (E), building positive interpersonal relationships (R), finding purpose by meaning to a cause greater than oneself (M), and recognizing areas of accomplishment and achievement (A) is the foundation for flourishing is well-being, which is made up of PERMA. People who are in this condition prosper both as an individual and as a group, feel full of life, and thrive. Positive psychology is positioned as a rigorous scientific methodology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

Based on research was done by Wang *et al.*, (2021) involving positive psychology while learning and teaching has been given a result that effective language teaching is an emotionally-charged activity that involves language instructors interacting and communicating with each learner while they enthusiastically teach the subject matter in a fun learning environment (Pishghadam *et al.*, 2019). Effective language teaching is not just a matter of conveying the content and pedagogical knowledge and using novel teaching methods and techniques (Xie and Derakhshan, 2021). As a result, the current study can be useful to those who train and educate language teachers since it will help them include positive psychology and its benefits in the courses, workshops, and teacher education programs they offer for eager pre- and in-service language teachers. By learning about the positive psychology movement, its core principles, its prominence in L2 learning and teaching, and the potential teacher or student positive variables contributing to desirable academic outcomes, trainee teachers can develop their theoretical and practical knowledge in such programs (Gabry-Barker, 2021). Besides, McIntyre & Mercer, (2014) concluded by stating that positive psychology is not random psychology, but rather a fast increasing discipline of science with rigorous techniques and a bright future. Studies have been done involving PP in the second language acquisition (SLA) and the viewpoint is being advanced in SLA, which helps to make sure that the literature covers the complete spectrum of positive and negative experiences with languages, communication, and the learning processes. With the advent of PP, a vast, varied assortment of unexplored themes becomes accessible. The SLA discipline may be in a unique position to collaborate with PP to produce original ideas and research.

Based on the explanation above, this study explore to answer questions which classified as follows;

1. How does Positive Psychology influence the lower, medium, and outstanding-level students' ability?
2. How do Positive Psychology aspects affect students' EFL acquisition?

Related to the questions research above, the hypothesis which affects learning foreign languages while engaging in positive psychology was the emotional elements including feelings like motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety related to learning a language. And

negative emotions will inhibit effective learning input, whilst happy emotions will encourage its development.

2. METHOD

This study was carried out at one of Universities in Subang while involving five participants students in the English Language Education Department. In addition, since this study aims to investigate types of Positive Psychology in the classroom setting, descriptive qualitative research with a questionnaire and interview design were used. The data were then analyzed qualitatively using some stages such as data collection (recording), interpretation, and report writing are all steps in the data analysis process (Creswell, 2009).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings and discussion of this study are presented in this section.

Findings

As the research findings, there are four the most influential factors that affect students involved Positive Psychology in university students of Subang, such as;

Gratitude

Gratitude is a mindset that values life positively and gives more attention. Two steps of information processing result in gratitude. The person must first be conscious of their positive experiences before connecting them to outside sources (McCullough, *et al.*, 2001). A sense of respect for one's skills can lead to gratitude. Gratitude acts as a coping strategy that allows people to focus on pleasant recollections instead of a pattern of lack of appreciation when they are faced with challenges (Watkins, 2004). The gratitude that grows in every student for what they are living will make them walk in a more positive direction regardless of how small their gain in learning. Children who depart with gratitude within themselves tend to be more positive in facing every obstacle and make themselves more resilient to the difficulties and blessings they get. Also, bring their character to be better prepared to get the knowledge they need in the future.

Conversation below is the result of an item in the questions' interview with a participant.

Researcher : *"Apa bentuk syukur yang selama ini kamu punya dalam mempelajari Bahasa Inggris?"*

"What kind of gratitude did you have in learning English?"

Participant : *"Bentuk syukur yang saya punya yaitu dengan saya mempelajari Bahasa Inggris, mm... saya bisa membantu orang lain maupun keluarga dalam memahami Bahasa Inggris khususnya saya sendiri. Contohnya dalam keluarga, saya bisa membantu saudara mengerjakan pekerjaan rumah, dan mungkin saya bisa membantu siapapun dalam memahami bahasa tersebut."*

"The kind of gratitude that I have while learning English, mm... I can help other people and my family understand English, especially for myself. For example I am able to help my sister to do her homework or perhaps I can help anyone to understand the language."

Students' Perspectives

At the sample schools, many EFL students have a poor opinion of themselves as language learners. They constantly feel insecure, hesitant, and concerned about failure. If they don't succeed, they attribute it to their teachers, the test material, or just plain bad luck. Some pupils are reluctant to retry. They despise learning and can't wait to pass the exams and receive their diploma. Every time they have a class presentation, writing or translation task, term paper, or midterm exam, they become anxious. They study late into the night before exams. They constantly work to present a positive self-image to their teacher. Lecturers are permitted to improvise when presenting the information so that it is more easily understood by the students. However, students frequently lack motivation, gripe excessively, feel unappreciated, and have more negative emotions when coping with various issues. If these issues are not resolved right away, students risk aging physically or becoming less mature in their development as individuals who are prepared to confront the future and join a civilized society (Tarihoran et al., 2019). In addition, most of them feed their fear while doing the examination just like their answer in a question from the questionnaire below.

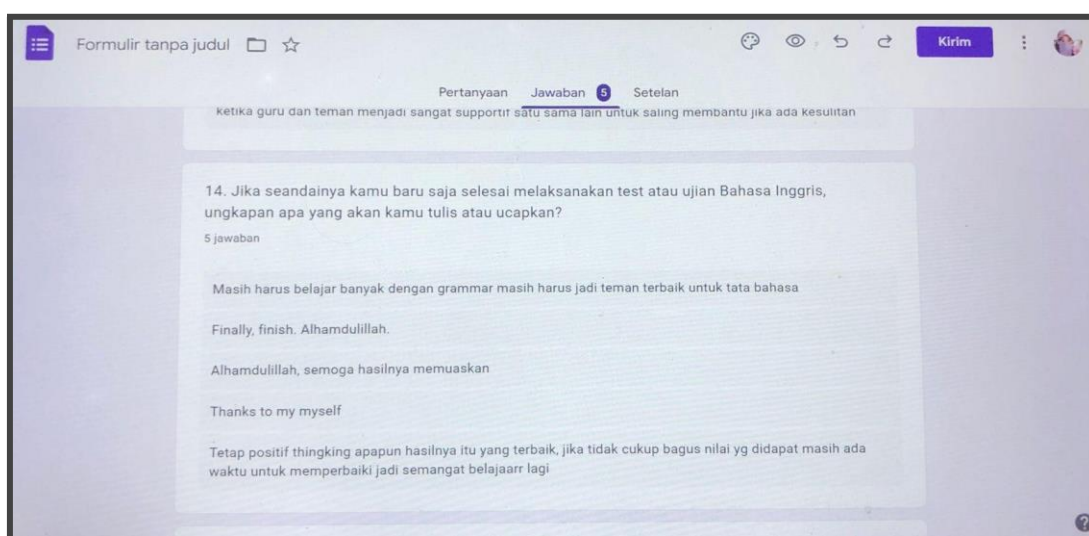


Figure 3.1 Findings of Questionnaires

Motivation

Regardless of being at the center of language learning and teaching, emotions have largely been ignored in recent applied linguistic studies. "...emotions are the elephants in the room – poorly studied, poorly understood, seen as inferior to rational thought" (Swain, 2013 p. 195). Despite their difference of motivation, Al-Jarf (Reily, 2021) a discussion of an advanced bilingual person, a 45-second mindfulness exercise, and a reflection meant to encourage a growth mentality were among the free voluntary reading exercises advanced EFL college students from Mexico participated in. The treatment's findings indicated that a range of achievement motivation had developed throughout the course, and they suggested that EFL instructors should help students feel happy feelings of achievement by incorporating activities like those in the treatment into their classroom lessons.

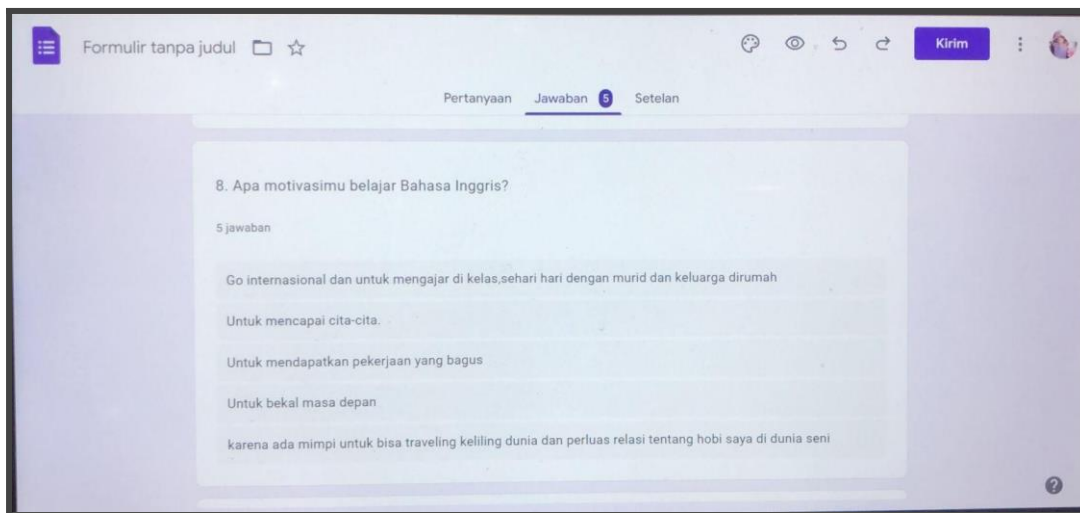


Figure 3.2 Findings of Questionnaires

Self-Confidence

Anyone having a stake in the individual's performance is encouraged to increase and maintain his self-esteem because a better level of self-confidence increases the person's motivation. First, the manipulator might be someone else who wants to see him "get his act together" or else focus on the task at hand (a parent, teacher, spouse, friend, coworker, or manager). The first reason may be that thinking of oneself favorably just makes a person happier: self—image is then simply another argument in the utility function. Indeed, psychologists emphasize the affective benefits of self—esteem as well as the functional ones on which we shall focus (Bénabou & Tirole 2000).

Researcher : *“Apa pengalaman terburuk kamu mempelajari Bahasa Inggris?”*

“What are the worst experiences you get while learning English?”

Participant : *“Disorakin ketika ada salah pengucapan.”*

“Cheered when there is a mispronunciation.”

Self-confidence plays a very important role in the acquisition of English as a foreign language because in language every student is required to carry out two-way communication involving listeners and speakers in listening, speaking, and understanding especially those with backgrounds that have experienced bullying when applying English, such as an example in interview findings above.

Discussion

According to the summary above, the rapidly expanding field of positive psychology in psychology has significant implications for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Teaching pleasant strategies in EFL lessons has been suggested as a result of the rising rate of sorrow among students around the world and the relationship between learning and education. By describing the main concepts of positive psychology, this study aims to investigate how they might be used in language learning activities. Fostering positive educational experiences for students and assisting them in achieving their best potential for success are among the objectives of many language instructors (Fredrickson, 2001).

As far as we are concerned, the majority of students in Indonesia still regard English as one of the courses to be respected and utilize it as a frightening lesson. Engaging in enjoyable activities that are simple to grasp helps students engage their emotions and breaks the mental block paradigm that some Indonesian students still have about how tough it is to learn English. Positive Psychology (PP) allows us to learn one of the approaches used by researchers to offer content a few years ago.

4. CONCLUSION

Involving positive psychology in learning activities is highly recommended, especially in language learning. It can be concluded that minimally there are four beneficial factors that affect students in learning English. There are gratitude, students' perspective, motivation and self-confidence. As this study was conducted, the four factors are quite significant in students' performance. The classroom is useful for better acquisition in the EFL classroom. In addition, Positive Psychology realized the benefits of teachers and students for making the classroom less boring because there is always existing new motivation between students and teachers.

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