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Teacher Strategies in Developing Students Emotional Competence in English Language Learning: A Narrative Inquiry Study

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Abstract:

Learning English is difficult, particularly for non-native speakers who have to become proficient in not just grammar and vocabulary but also emotional competency to convey clearly. Language acquisition is significantly influenced by emotional competence, which is the capacity to identify, comprehend, and regulate one's own and others' emotions. This study is to look at the ways English language teachers use to help their students become emotionally competent. This study gathers interview data using a narrative inquiry technique to expose the lived experiences and perspectives of English teachers. The study of the data emphasizes trends and narratives showing how emotional competency is included into English instruction methods. The results show that teachers successfully enhance students' emotional competency by using contextual textbooks, presentations, English songs, observational assessments, and honest evaluations among other approaches. This study adds to the body of knowledge on emotional intelligence in the classroom and has application for curriculum creation and teacher preparation programs. This study aims to explore teachers' strategies in developing students' emotional competence and their impact on the success of English language learning through a narrative inquiry approach. The findings offer practical insights for improving teacher training and curriculum development in order to support a balanced integration of students' emotional and academic development

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Introduction

English has become the dominant international language, functioning as a *lingua franca* that connects people across diverse linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is the medium of global communication in education, business, science, diplomacy, and technology (Crystal, 2003). As such, competence in English is widely regarded as a key to academic success and socioeconomic mobility in many non-English-speaking countries, including Indonesia. However, in Indonesia English is taught and learned as a foreign language, and students often encounter significant difficulties in mastering it because of their limited opportunities for authentic exposure outside the classroom. For many students, especially those entering formal English instruction for the first time at the junior secondary level, learning English is associated with high levels of anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of failure (Hamied, 2012). These affective challenges demonstrate that successful English language learning requires not only cognitive-linguistic skills but also affective and socio-emotional capacities.

In this regard, the concept of emotional competence has received growing attention. Emotional competence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and appropriately express emotions in ways that facilitate interpersonal interactions and task performance (Boyatzis, 2009; Goleman, 2005). It is closely linked to the broader construct of emotional intelligence but is often framed more specifically in terms of observable skills and classroom behaviors (Wolf, 2005). Within the context of language education, emotional competence enables learners to manage their fear of making mistakes, to maintain motivation during challenging tasks, and to collaborate effectively with peers. Students who are emotionally competent are better able to engage in communicative activities, persist through difficulties, and respond constructively to teacher feedback (Mesquita, 2015).

Research has shown that emotional competence plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic achievement and social adjustment. For example, Wahyuddin (2016) and Wirajaya et al. (2019) found that Indonesian students with higher levels of emotional competence demonstrated superior English achievement and stronger classroom participation. Internationally, studies have suggested that teaching strategies which explicitly nurture students' emotional skills—such as empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation—also contribute to improved language learning outcomes (Yuan & Lee, 2016). These findings affirm that emotional development and academic achievement are interdependent rather than separate domains.

Teachers play a central role in supporting the development of emotional competence in their students. Pedagogical strategies that incorporate real-world contexts, authentic materials, and collaborative learning activities have been found to create emotionally supportive learning environments (Shao & Ying, 2024). In addition, behavior-related strategies such as addressing students by name, showing genuine interest in their well-being, and maintaining an atmosphere of trust and respect can reduce anxiety and promote confidence (Shahidzade et al., 2022). In the specific context of language classrooms, teachers' efforts to balance cognitive and emotional goals are especially crucial, since language learning involves not only intellectual effort but also personal expression and identity formation.

In Indonesia, however, much of the research on emotional competence has focused on correlational studies that link students' emotional abilities with their academic achievement. Far less attention has been given to the practical strategies that teachers

employ to develop emotional competence as part of their teaching. Moreover, limited research has examined these issues in pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, which represent a distinctive educational setting in Indonesia. Pesantren combine general and religious education within a structured environment characterized by discipline, moral guidance, and communal living. These characteristics shape both teaching practices and student experiences in unique ways. While pesantren have increasingly included English in their curricula, little is known about how teachers in such contexts integrate the development of emotional competence into their pedagogy.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the strategies used by English teachers at Darul Amien Islamic Boarding School in South Kalimantan to develop their students' emotional competence. The study also investigates teachers' lived experiences, including the challenges they face and the reflections they derive from their practice. By focusing on teachers' narratives, the research highlights not only what strategies are used but also how teachers interpret and adapt these strategies in the context of a pesantren.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on the intersection between emotional competence and second language acquisition, particularly in contexts where culture and religion influence educational practices. It extends the discussion of emotional competence from the domain of student outcomes to the domain of teacher strategies and lived experiences. Practically, the study provides insights for teacher training and curriculum design, emphasizing the importance of integrating emotional pedagogy into English language instruction. It suggests that fostering emotional competence can help students overcome affective barriers, build resilience, and participate more fully in communicative learning activities. By documenting the experiences of teachers in a pesantren, the study also offers guidance for educators working in culturally embedded and resource-limited environments.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative design with a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences and provides insights into how they construct meaning from their teaching practices (Creswell, 2018). The focus of this research was not only to identify strategies used by teachers but also to capture the personal interpretations, reflections, and challenges that accompanied these strategies. Through the collection of stories and accounts, narrative inquiry provided a rich, contextualized understanding of how teachers foster emotional competence in English language learning.

The study was conducted at Darul Amien Islamic Boarding School in Hulu Sungai Selatan, South Kalimantan. This pesantren context is distinctive in that it integrates Islamic education with general subjects, including English, within a disciplined and community-oriented environment. Such a setting presents both opportunities and constraints for language learning, as students are shaped by moral guidance, collective living, and limited access to modern digital resources. Two English teachers from the junior secondary level (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) were purposively selected to participate. They were responsible for teaching seventh-grade students who were encountering English formally for the first time, guiding them from no prior structured exposure to compulsory English instruction at the secondary level.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed narratives. The interview protocol was informed by prior frameworks on teacher strategies for developing students' emotional competence, such as Shao and Ying (2024) and Shahidzade et al. (2022). Teachers were asked to describe their use of authentic tasks, classroom management strategies, assessment practices, and relational approaches. Additional questions encouraged them to reflect on challenges, student reactions, and personal experiences of success and difficulty. Interviews were conducted in a conversational style to encourage storytelling, consistent with the principles of narrative inquiry.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach. The interviews were transcribed, coded inductively, and clustered into thematic categories related to teaching strategies, experiences, and outcomes. Narratives were then re-storied into coherent accounts that preserved participants' voices while highlighting recurring themes. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by sharing emerging findings with participants for validation, while peer debriefing with colleagues helped refine coding and thematic development. Transferability was supported through thick description of the setting, and reflexive journaling enhanced dependability and confirmability (Elo et al., 2014; Stahl & King, 2020). Ethical approval was secured from institutional authorities, and participants provided informed consent. They were assured confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any point during the research.

Results and Discussion

Findings

The narratives of the two participating teachers revealed several strategies that they employed to foster students' emotional competence in English learning. These strategies included the use of textbooks with real-life contexts, group discussions, role-play activities, student presentations, songs, observation-based assessments, and the cultivation of supportive classroom atmospheres alongside personal teacher-student relationships.

The use of textbooks with real-life contexts was one of the most salient strategies. Both teachers relied on books adapted from Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Gontor, which provided thematic units closely connected to students' daily lives. Students reported feeling more comfortable engaging in English when they recognized the relevance of the materials to their own experiences.

Group discussions were also emphasized. Teachers frequently organized students into small groups, allowing them to share ideas and solve problems collaboratively. This practice reduced anxiety and created safe spaces for participation, particularly for shy learners.

Role-play emerged as another significant approach. Teachers designed scenarios such as shopping, visiting a doctor, or debating social issues. Initially, some students resisted performing in front of peers, but with encouragement and supportive pairing, they began to participate actively and with enthusiasm.

Student presentations provided further opportunities to build confidence. Assignments required learners to speak about personal experiences, hobbies, or stories, gradually strengthening their ability to organize thoughts and communicate clearly in front of an audience. Songs were integrated into the classroom to create a joyful

atmosphere. By singing English songs, students unconsciously practiced pronunciation and vocabulary, while enjoying a stress-free activity that enhanced motivation.

Assessment practices were primarily observation-based. Teachers evaluated student effort, participation, and enthusiasm rather than focusing exclusively on written results. This approach recognized diverse forms of achievement and boosted learners' confidence.

Finally, both teachers highlighted the importance of building warm relationships with students and maintaining a supportive classroom atmosphere. They consciously balanced discipline with empathy, addressed students personally, and showed care for their well-being. This relational approach fostered trust and made students more open to learning.

Analysis

The findings of this study demonstrate that the strategies implemented by English teachers at Darul Amien Islamic Boarding School were directed not only toward the development of students' linguistic competence but also toward the cultivation of their emotional competence. This dual orientation substantiates the theoretical proposition that cognitive and affective domains of learning are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Goleman, 2005; Shao & Ying, 2024; Shahidzade et al., 2022).

The integration of authentic and real-life tasks, such as oral presentations of holiday experiences and role-playing activities, proved particularly significant in bridging linguistic acquisition with emotional engagement. These practices provided learners with opportunities to articulate personal experiences, exercise empathy, and engage in collaborative dialogue, thereby fostering both communicative proficiency and socio-emotional growth. Such findings affirm the view that emotional competence is not an ancillary aspect of education but rather an inherent dimension of communicative language pedagogy.

Equally notable is the teachers' preference for observational and process-oriented assessments, which diverge from conventional product-oriented evaluation. This approach acknowledges learners' efforts, progress, and affective engagement, thereby mitigating performance anxiety and strengthening motivation and self-esteem. It aligns with contemporary perspectives that emphasize holistic evaluation, wherein both cognitive outcomes and emotional development are recognized as essential indicators of learning success.

Nevertheless, the data also reveal persistent challenges. Institutional constraints, particularly restrictions on the use of digital media, limited the teachers' capacity to incorporate technology-enhanced language learning. Moreover, student-related factors, such as shyness and reluctance to participate in role-playing tasks, necessitated adaptive and flexible instructional responses. These findings highlight the complex interplay between pedagogical ideals and contextual realities, underscoring the necessity for teachers to exercise creativity and resilience in strategy implementation.

In sum, the analysis suggests that teacher strategies aimed at fostering emotional competence in English language learning are most effective when they (1) establish meaningful connections between classroom tasks and students' lived experiences; (2) promote collaborative learning and peer interaction; (3) employ assessment practices

that capture both academic and affective growth; and (4) cultivate a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that prioritizes interpersonal relationships and student well-being. This interpretation reinforces the argument that the integration of emotional competence within language pedagogy is indispensable for achieving comprehensive educational outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that teachers at Darul Amien Islamic Boarding School employed strategies that intertwined cognitive and emotional goals. By embedding authentic contexts in textbooks, they reduced anxiety and enhanced relevance, confirming Shao and Ying's (2024) argument that authentic tasks foster emotional as well as linguistic engagement. Group discussions provided safe, collaborative environments, consistent with Shahidzade et al.'s (2022) observation that cooperative learning strengthens both academic and social-emotional skills.

Role-play was shown to reduce language learning anxiety while cultivating empathy and resilience. Yuan and Lee (2016) similarly found that role-play helps learners explore new identities and regulate emotions associated with performance. Student presentations, while initially intimidating, gradually nurtured self-confidence and self-efficacy, supporting Bandura's (1997) claim that structured opportunities for mastery build persistence and motivation.

The integration of songs reflected the value of multimodal strategies in sustaining learners' attention and enjoyment. As Shahidzade et al. (2022) note, music stimulates emotional engagement, creating a relaxed yet productive classroom environment. Observation-based assessment also reflected a holistic approach, emphasizing participation and effort rather than only outcomes. Such practices reduced test anxiety and affirmed student progress, resonating with Shao and Ying's (2024) recommendation for realistic assessment.

Perhaps most critically, the cultivation of supportive teacher-student relationships highlighted the behavioral dimension of emotional pedagogy. The teachers' empathy and attentiveness confirmed Shahidzade et al.'s (2022) findings that teacher behavior directly influences learners' emotional growth. Rohner's (2014) parental acceptance-rejection theory further underscores the importance of warm relationships in shaping emotional development.

Nonetheless, challenges were evident. Restrictions on digital media limited access to authentic online resources, requiring teachers to adapt creatively. Engaging shy students in role-play and presentations remained difficult, suggesting the need for gradual scaffolding. Despite these challenges, both teachers reported noticeable improvements in confidence, motivation, and collaborative skills, affirming that emotional competence can be cultivated through consistent strategies.

Theoretically, the study extends the literature by positioning emotional competence as a mediator in second language acquisition. Practically, it suggests that teacher education should incorporate training in emotional pedagogy, preparing teachers to integrate affective support with linguistic instruction. In pesantren contexts, where discipline and moral guidance shape pedagogy, strategies such as role-play, songs, and personal relationships can be powerful tools for fostering socio-emotional growth.

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