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How Achievement Emotions Shape Learner Engagement in Efl Listening: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract:

Building on a preliminary quantitative study that identified the dominance of positive emotions over negative emotions in EFL listening classes, this study extends that inquiry to explain these patterns qualitatively and examine their relationship with learner engagement in EFL listening instruction. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study involved 37 second- and fourth-semester students enrolled in a Listening course in the English Education Department at a university in Indonesia. Quantitative data were collected using the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire–Short (AEQ-S), while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 volunteer participants and analyzed using inductive thematic coding. Positive emotions were significantly higher than negative emotions across classroom, learning, and test-related situations ($t(36) = 6.947, p < .001$), with enjoyment emerging as the most frequently reported emotion. The qualitative findings further identified confidence, motivation, and interest as dominant positive emotions, while anxiety, nervousness, insecurity, and frustration were primarily triggered by limited vocabulary, fast speech rates, and unfamiliar accents. Despite these challenges, students demonstrated strong behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, reflected in note-taking, repeated listening, peer discussion, and independent exposure to English media. While prior research has quantified the prevalence of achievement emotions in EFL listening, this study offers new insight by explaining, through learners' own accounts, how these emotions translate into observable engagement behaviors. These findings indicate that fostering enjoyment while providing targeted support for negative emotions, such as pre-teaching vocabulary and graduated exposure to varied accents, is critical to sustaining learner engagement in EFL listening instruction.

Keywords: Achievement Emotions; EFL Listening; Learner Engagement; Mixed-Methods; Positive Emotions

INTRODUCTION

In the absence of visual aids during these listening sessions, students generally adopt one of two mindsets. The first group exhibits an indifferent attitude, assuming they can passively listen and still absorb the material; as a result, they often fail to engage and consequently do not retain the information. Listening, however, is a critical receptive skill and serves as a primary conduit for information acquisition. If the input is flawed or the processing is inaccurate, the resulting comprehension will inevitably be compromised.

Conversely, some students find listening challenging because it differs significantly from watching videos or listening to music, where subtitles or lyrics provide additional support. These students often feel unable to understand content without the aid of written text. In a listening class, however, visual aids are absent, and all reliance is placed on auditory input and spoken instructions, compelling students to depend solely on their listening skills. These contrasting mindsets, indifference on one hand, anxiety on the other, suggest that students' emotional orientations toward listening form even before instruction begins and that these emotions significantly influence how they engage with and benefit from listening activities.

In listening classes, certain aspects, such as the role of emotions, are often overlooked. While emotions are prominently recognized in productive skills like writing and speaking, where their impact is more evident, their significance in receptive skills such as listening remains less clear. Numerous studies have explored how emotions influence productive skills; however, research on the emotional dimension of listening is limited and underdeveloped. One possible reason for this is that listening, as a receptive skill, may not receive the same attention regarding emotional engagement because it does not involve active production or creation of language.

Additionally, listening is frequently underestimated in comparison to reading, which is often viewed as a more information-rich activity. Consequently, the importance of emotions in listening, particularly for EFL learners, tends to be disregarded or deemed insignificant. This prevailing assumption may stem from the perception that listening is an easier skill, lacking the complexity associated with reading strategies such as paraphrasing, skimming, or scanning, or the active demands of speaking and writing. As a result, the emotional experiences of learners during listening activities remain an underexplored area in language education. This gap is significant because if educators do not understand the emotional landscape of listening learners, they cannot design instruction that adequately supports them.

Recent developments in positive psychology have further reinforced the importance of attending to learners' emotional experiences. Fredrickson's (2001) *Broaden-and-Build Theory* proposes that positive emotions expand learners' cognitive and behavioral repertoires, encouraging exploration, creativity, and the development of personal resources. In language learning contexts, this suggests that positive emotions such as enjoyment and interest do not merely reflect pleasant experiences but actively facilitate deeper engagement and more effective learning. This perspective complements Pekrun's (2006) Control-Value Theory in offering a theoretical basis for understanding how emotions shape learners' responses to listening activities.

In an EFL context, this challenge is considerably more complex, as students are not native speakers who have acquired the language naturally from birth. As EFL learners, students do not solely study foreign grammar; they also must comprehend how the language is used in practice and the appropriate contexts for its application, alongside the extensive range of linguistic variations. These complexities are particularly pronounced in listening classes, where students contend with numerous concerns. Within the broader

field of foreign language research, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) introduced Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) as a distinct positive emotional construct experienced by learners in language classrooms. FLE has since been recognized as a robust predictor of motivation, engagement, and willingness to communicate, and its relevance extends beyond productive skills to receptive contexts such as listening.

Alongside FLE, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers a complementary perspective by highlighting the role of learners' basic psychological needs, particularly competence, autonomy, and relatedness, in sustaining motivation and emotional well-being. When these needs are met, learners are more likely to experience positive emotions and remain engaged even in the face of difficulty, a pattern particularly relevant to the demanding context of EFL listening. They frequently experience emotions that are often perceived as negative, arising from an increased sense of vulnerability and a lack of clear guidance. Consequently, understanding the emotions that EFL learners experience during listening activities and how these emotions influence their engagement is not a peripheral issue but a fundamental pedagogical concern.

Educators should give balanced attention to both positive and negative emotions in the listening classroom. Most existing research has focused primarily on anxiety or negative emotions that dominate skills-oriented classes. However, it is important for educators to also consider students' positive emotions, particularly in listening classes, as these emotions indicate which parts of the lesson students find engaging. In this regard, identifying areas of interest allows educators to pinpoint moments of student engagement within the lesson. This understanding benefits students by increasing their motivation, enhancing their engagement, and ultimately improving their academic performance.

Achievement emotions, ranging from positive active emotions like enjoyment to negative passive ones like boredom, act as critical drivers that either amplify or constrain learner engagement in receptive language skills. By recognizing both positive and negative emotions in the listening classroom, educators can more effectively tailor their methods, strategies, and activities to better suit the needs of their students. Furthermore, understanding how emotions such as boredom interact with other achievement emotions may provide additional insight into learners' engagement patterns. Recent research by Pawlak et al. (2020) as cited in Huang and Zhang (2025) has suggested that boredom in language learning is not simply the absence of interest but a distinct emotional experience with its own antecedents and consequences, such as engagement, or stimulation for foreign language learning tasks and activities. Further, this phenomenon, known as foreign language boredom (FLB), represents a negative emotional state that extends from conventional boredom and manifests as a diminished drive toward learning goals and a negative emotional experience while acquiring a foreign language. Examining whether and how boredom emerges, or fails to emerge, in listening classrooms may therefore contribute to a more complete picture of learners' emotional experiences.

The present study therefore seeks to examine the full spectrum of achievement emotions, both positive and negative, experienced by EFL learners during classroom listening activities. This study seeks to address the following research questions: 1. What positive and negative emotions do English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners experience during classroom listening activities? 2. In what ways do these emotions affect EFL learners' engagement in classroom listening activities?

Given the growing evidence of the relationship between emotions and learning outcomes, emotions can no longer be considered peripheral factors in language education. Instead, they constitute a fundamental dimension of the language learning

experience that deserves systematic investigation, particularly within specific language skills and learning contexts. The growing recognition of emotions in language learning has encouraged researchers to apply achievement emotion theories to second and foreign language contexts. Among the most influential frameworks is Pekrun's (2006) *Control-Value Theory (CVT)*, which explains how learners' emotions are shaped by their perceptions of control over learning tasks and the value they attach to those tasks. According to the control-value theory (CVT) of achievement emotions, achievement emotions are affective states tied to academic activities or outcomes, which can be positive or negative (Liu et al., 2025). Within EFL settings, this framework has proven particularly relevant because language learners frequently encounter situations that evoke strong emotional reactions, such as communicating in a non-native language, participating in classroom interactions, and completing language-related assessments.

Drawing upon CVT, achievement emotions in EFL learning are commonly categorized into positive emotions, such as enjoyment, hope, and pride, and negative emotions, including anxiety, boredom, and hopelessness (Pekrun et al., 2011). To facilitate the systematic investigation of achievement emotions, Pekrun et al. (2011) developed the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ), which measures learners' emotional experiences across learning activities, classroom situations, and achievement-related outcomes. A shorter version, the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire-Short (AEQ-S), was later introduced while maintaining satisfactory reliability and validity (Putwain & Pekrun, 2017). Recent studies have demonstrated the value of applying achievement emotion frameworks in EFL settings. Despite this growing body of research, achievement emotions have not been examined equally across language skills. In contrast, receptive skills, especially listening, have received considerably less attention, highlighting a notable gap in the literature.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to investigate EFL learners' emotional experiences during classroom listening activities and explore how these emotions shaped their engagement in learning. Quantitative data were collected first using the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire-Short (AEQ-S), followed by semi-structured interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of students' experiences.

Participants

The study involved 37 second- and fourth-semester students enrolled in a Listening course in the English Education Department at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia. All students completed the questionnaire. Following the quantitative phase, 20 students voluntarily agreed to participate in follow-up interviews.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study. First, quantitative data were collected using the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire-Short (AEQ-S) developed by Pekrun et al. (2011). The questionnaire measures six achievement emotions: enjoyment, hope, pride, anxiety, boredom, and hopelessness. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a more detailed understanding of students' emotional experiences, focusing on feelings during listening activities, challenges encountered, and the ways these experiences influenced their participation and learning behaviors.

Data Collection

Data were collected at the end of the semester after students had completed the Listening course. The questionnaire was administered first, followed by interviews with 20 volunteer participants. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian to allow participants to express their thoughts more comfortably. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The excerpts presented in this article were translated into English by the researchers.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each emotion subscale. The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding using an inductive approach, allowing patterns and themes to emerge from participants' responses. Data from the interviews were coded together within the same thematic framework, which allowed recurring patterns to be corroborated across both data sources rather than relying on a single instrument or a small number of vocal participants. During the integration phase, the qualitative findings were compared with the quantitative results to identify converging and complementary patterns.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Positive Achievement Emotions in EFL Listening Activities

The quantitative findings revealed that students experienced significantly higher positive emotions than negative emotions across all three academic situations. In classroom-related activities, positive emotions ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.65$) were significantly higher than negative emotions ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.71$), ($t(36) = 6.947$, $p < .001$). A similar pattern was observed in learning-related ($t(36) = 6.139$, $p < .001$) and test-related situations ($t(36) = 5.488$, $p < .001$). Among all six emotions measured, enjoyment emerged as the most frequently experienced emotion.

These findings are consistent with recent studies in EFL contexts that have demonstrated the prevalence of positive emotions in language learning classrooms (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022). From the perspective of Pekrun's (2006) Control-Value Theory, the dominance of positive emotions suggests that students perceived listening activities as both valuable and manageable. The qualitative findings provided deeper insight. Enjoyment was the most prominent positive emotion reported by participants, who frequently described listening activities as engaging and meaningful. Several students expressed genuine enthusiasm, with one participant stating they enjoy listening class because it provides a lot of new knowledge, while another described it as “both challenging and beneficial.”

Confidence growth also emerged as a salient positive emotional experience. Many participants described a trajectory in which initial uncertainty gradually gave way to greater self-assurance. One participant noted that the Listening course transformed them into a more confident person, while another observed that over time they became accustomed to listening to English and their comprehension gradually improved. Motivation and interest were also frequently reported. One student remarked that the challenges in listening encourage continuous improvement of English skills, reflecting an orientation toward challenge as a catalyst for growth (Dweck, 2006) and aligning with Norton and De Costa's (2018) concept of investment. This trajectory from struggle to confidence was captured vividly by one participant, who described feeling afraid of poor

performance after a difficult test but resolved to keep trying because, in their words, “at least I am brave to speak English in front of all my classmates.”

Negative Achievement Emotions and Their Sources

Although positive emotions were dominant, negative emotions were also present and warrant careful attention. Anxiety was the most frequently reported negative emotion. It appears that many students underestimate the importance of listening, dismissing it as a trivial task when, in fact, it is essential. They may mistakenly believe that listening merely involves hearing sounds, without appreciating that effective listening requires comprehension, which in turn facilitates analysis and evaluation.

Participants identified multiple sources of anxiety, including limited vocabulary, rapid speech rates, unfamiliar accents, and performance demands. The emergence of anxiety and frustration triggered by fast speech rates and unfamiliar accents is closely linked to learners' low control appraisals regarding the listening task. As highlighted in Ji et al. (2022), when learners perceive a lack of control over demanding listening input, negative achievement emotions predominate, thereby impairing their cognitive engagement. One participant described often feeling nervous and confused in the beginning, especially when unable to catch important information. Another noted always feeling nervous during presentations due to concerns about pronunciation. These accounts are consistent with a substantial body of research identifying listening anxiety as a common and multifaceted experience in EFL contexts (Liu & Yuan, 2021).

Insecurity and fear of failure also emerged as recurring emotional experiences, particularly in relation to social comparison. Several participants reported feeling inadequate when comparing themselves to peers with stronger listening skills. As one participant reflected, “My confidence was completely shattered, and I felt like I had chosen the wrong major”, describing this as a mix of confidence and insecurity. Fear of failure was closely tied to this sense of inadequacy, particularly around graded tasks; another participant admitted that during presentations they would sometimes “just go blank,” losing track of what they had prepared to say. Frustration and cognitive overload were also reported, particularly in relation to fast speech rates and unfamiliar vocabulary. One student noted the difficulty when audio was played at a low volume while the speaker talked very quickly. Another observed that limited vocabulary frequently prevents understanding the context of listening materials.

These findings are consistent with the view that listening is one of the most cognitively demanding language skills (Ahmadi Safa & Motaghi, 2024). Boredom, by contrast, was rarely reported. This may be explained by Kruk et al. (2021) that boredom in language classrooms is primarily driven by repetitiveness, monotony, and predictability, conditions less likely to arise in a listening course that incorporates varied audio materials, discussion, and authentic media. This contrasts with Jian and Tengyao's (2023) longitudinal finding that boredom was experienced at a moderate level among EFL majors in a reading course, suggesting that the skill being taught, and the extent to which instruction varies from lesson to lesson, may shape how much boredom learners experience.

The Influence of Emotions on Student Engagement

For many years, language learning research was dominated by cognitive perspectives that emphasized learners' mental processes, such as memory, attention, and information processing. However, recent developments in educational psychology and second language acquisition (SLA) have increasingly recognized that learning is not solely a cognitive endeavour but also an emotional experience. Emotions are now viewed as central factors that influence how learners perceive, engage with, and respond to learning activities (Pekrun, 2006). Achievement emotions refer to emotions directly

linked to learning activities and achievement-related outcomes, including enjoyment, hope, pride, anxiety, boredom, and hopelessness (Pekrun et al., 2011). According to Pekrun's (2006) Control-Value Theory (CVT), these emotions emerge from learners' perceptions of control over academic tasks and the value they assign to those tasks. When learners perceive a task as valuable and believe they can successfully perform it, positive emotions such as enjoyment and hope are likely to occur. Conversely, perceptions of low control may lead to negative emotions, including anxiety and hopelessness. Negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration act as debilitating anxiety that impairs students' cognitive engagement. As Xu (2011) explains, the worry accompanying anxiety consumes cognitive energy that should otherwise be allocated to memory and information processing (working/short-term memory), thereby hindering listening performance.

In the field of language learning, emotions have been shown to significantly influence learners' motivation, engagement, self-regulation, and academic performance (Hiver et al., 2021). Rather than being merely outcomes of learning experiences, emotions actively shape the learning process itself. Positive emotions can enhance learners' willingness to participate, sustain effort, and overcome learning difficulties, whereas negative emotions may reduce concentration, increase avoidance behaviors, and hinder achievement (Mega et al., 2020). Among positive emotions, enjoyment has received considerable attention in recent SLA research.

Within the broader field of foreign language research, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) as a distinct construct reflecting learners' positive emotional experiences in language classrooms. FLE has since been recognized as a robust predictor of motivation, engagement, and willingness to communicate, and its relevance extends to specific skill contexts including listening. Alongside FLE, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers a complementary lens through which learners' emotional and motivational experiences can be understood. According to this framework, learners are more likely to experience positive emotions and sustained engagement when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. The trajectory from anxiety to confidence reported by many learners in listening classrooms may reflect the gradual fulfilment of these needs as learners develop greater competence and self-assurance over time.

Among the four language skills, listening presents a distinctive set of emotional experiences. Unlike reading, where learners can revisit a text, or writing, where they have time to formulate responses, listening requires learners to process spoken input in real time. This transient nature of spoken language demands sustained attention, rapid processing, and continuous meaning construction, making listening one of the most cognitively demanding skills in language learning (Ahmadi Safa & Motaghi, 2024). Research on emotions in listening has traditionally focused on negative emotional experiences, particularly anxiety. Listening anxiety is commonly associated with learners' fear of misunderstanding spoken messages, inability to keep pace with speech, unfamiliar accents, limited vocabulary knowledge, and concerns about performance during listening assessments.

Although anxiety remains one of the most frequently investigated emotions in listening research, recent studies suggest that focusing exclusively on negative emotions provides only a partial understanding of learners' experiences. Many learners also report positive emotional experiences, including enjoyment, hope, satisfaction, confidence, and a sense of accomplishment when they successfully understand spoken texts. The limited

attention given to positive emotions and challenge suggests that the emotional landscape of listening has not been fully understood.

Fredrickson's (2001) *Broaden-and-Build Theory* provides a useful framework for understanding the functional role of positive emotions in listening contexts. When learners experience enjoyment or interest during listening activities, their attentional scope broadens, enabling them to process input more flexibly and engage more deeply with the material. Over time, these positive emotional experiences accumulate into lasting personal resources, including vocabulary growth, strategic listening skills, and greater confidence in comprehension, outcomes that are closely aligned with the goals of EFL listening instruction.

Emotional experiences in language learning do not emerge in isolation from learners' personal goals, aspirations, and identities. Norton and De Costa (2018) discuss the concept of investment to explain why learners choose to engage with language learning despite difficulties. Learners invest time, effort, and emotional energy in language learning because they believe it can provide access to desired identities, opportunities, and social participation. Drawing on growth mindset theory, Dweck (2006) argues that learners who view abilities as developable are more likely to embrace challenges, persist through difficulties, and interpret setbacks as opportunities for improvement. In language learning contexts, challenge may occupy a unique position between positive and negative emotions, functioning as a productive psychological state that motivates learners to invest effort, adopt effective learning strategies, and remain engaged.

Student engagement has become an important concept in educational research because it reflects the extent to which learners actively participate in and commit themselves to learning activities. In language learning contexts, engagement is often viewed as a multidimensional construct involving behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions (Hiver et al., 2021). In listening classrooms, behavioral engagement often manifests through specific learning practices such as note-taking, replaying audio materials, discussing difficult passages with peers, and seeking additional exposure to English through podcasts, films, and other authentic listening resources. A growing body of research suggests that engagement is strongly influenced by learners' emotional experiences. Positive emotions are generally associated with greater persistence, willingness to participate, and active involvement, while negative emotions may reduce participation and encourage avoidance behaviors (Mega et al., 2020).

The qualitative findings revealed that students' emotional experiences had a significant influence on their engagement in listening activities across behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. In terms of behavioral engagement, participants demonstrated a wide range of active learning strategies both inside and outside the classroom. Note-taking, repeated listening, peer discussion, and independent exposure to English through films, podcasts, and other media were among the most frequently reported behaviors. As one participant summarized their approach, it involved "taking notes, doing my assignments earlier, studying the vocabulary if it feels 'foreign,' [and] watching movies without subtitles." Zhang and Nguyen (2022) highlight that self-regulated learning strategies, such as accurate self-evaluation and shifting the learning focus from merely 'getting correct answers' to 'understanding new material', are highly effective in alleviating anxiety and maintaining consistent learner engagement. Cognitive engagement was particularly evident in participants' descriptions of how their approaches to listening evolved. Several students reported moving toward more holistic comprehension approaches, including inferencing, contextual understanding, and

vocabulary monitoring. One participant noted beginning to think directly in English instead of translating everything into Indonesian.

Emotional engagement was also high. Despite encountering significant difficulties, most participants described maintaining their commitment to listening learning. One participant stated that although difficult at times, listening motivates continued practice and improvement. A particularly notable pattern was the emotional trajectory from anxiety to growing confidence reported by many participants. This trajectory suggests that emotional experiences in listening classrooms are not static but evolve dynamically in response to learners' developing competence. This is consistent with Norton and De Costa's (2018) view of learner identity as fluid and continually reconstructed through classroom interaction, suggesting that the emotional shifts observed here may reflect a broader process of identity renegotiation as learners come to see themselves as more capable users of English. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings converge to suggest that achievement emotions play a meaningful and multifaceted role in shaping EFL learners' engagement in listening classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that EFL learners experienced a mixture of positive and negative achievement emotions during classroom listening activities. Positive emotions, including enjoyment, confidence, motivation, and interest, were more dominant and were generally associated with students' perceptions of the course as valuable and beneficial for their language development. Negative emotions, particularly anxiety, nervousness, insecurity, and frustration, were also present and were primarily triggered by linguistic challenges such as limited vocabulary, fast speech rates, and unfamiliar accents. Despite these difficulties, most students demonstrated resilience by adopting active coping strategies including notetaking, repeated listening, peer consultation, and independent exposure to English outside the classroom.

These findings carry several pedagogical implications. Listening instructors are encouraged to design activities that promote enjoyment and a productive sense of challenge while providing sufficient scaffolding to prevent anxiety from becoming overwhelming. Constructive feedback, gradual increases in task difficulty, and opportunities for meaningful interaction may help students build confidence and sustain engagement over time. Attention to students' emotional experiences should be considered an integral part of effective listening instruction in EFL contexts. This study is not without limitations. The sample was drawn from a single department at one university in Indonesia, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider involving larger and more diverse samples across different institutional contexts.

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