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The Role of Positive Psychology in English Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract: *Positive psychology (PP) has developed rapidly in psychology, which has important implications for the field of English foreign language (EFL) classroom. The high prevalence of depression among students throughout the world and the synergy between learning and educating suggest that the skills for happiness should be taught in the EFL classroom. This study aims to explore the positive psychology and learning activities to the study of language by describing its main principles. The study was conducted using an exploratory approach in which data were collected through in-depth interviews with English lecturers and a questionnaire distributed to the students of the Islamic education department at the State Islamic University of Banten. The findings suggest that positive psychology can be brought into the classroom at Islamic higher education in Indonesia in fun and useful ways. The role of two main aspects in the process of teaching and educating, which are closely interconnected, is considered. It is expected that the students could both achieve foreign language skills and, at the same time, become more effective learners. It is based not only on the basic principles of teaching language but also on the application of the principle of positive psychology because teaching is closely related to mental aspects. The study provides several valuable insights into the expectations of the EFL classroom.*

Keywords*: EFL classroom, Islamic education, positive psychology, teaching, educating*

Introduction

Positive psychology is the study of how human beings prosper in the face of adversity (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is significantly influenced by the Humanistic approach. The term "positive psychology" first appeared in 1954 in the last chapter of Maslow's book Motivation and Personality, "Toward a Positive Psychology." In this part of the book, Maslow said that psychology itself does not have an accurate understanding of the human potential and may not develop. Furthermore, Maslow explained that psychology was more successful in explaining the negative side than the positive side of humans; digging too much about human shortcomings, disturbances, but only a little about human potential, talents, aspirations that can be achieved, or the highest psychological condition (in Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005).

The history of positive psychology is rooted in the psychology of humanism, whose discussion focuses on meaningfulness and happiness. Since the advent of positive psychology, studies of meaning and happiness have flourished and emerged among positive psychology figures. Positive psychology is a new branch of psychology which was first declared in 1998 by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.

In practice, all students at the Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Islamic University in Banten are required to attend English courses, namely Basic English, English for Conversation and English specifically related to their study programs. The English courses are taught by lecturers with an educational background who have a good understanding of psycholinguistics.

Theoretically, in addition to cognitive and affective aspects, students are expected to master the five skills, namely intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, professional skills, and learning skills. A lecturer teaches first-year students once a week (90 minutes) in three semesters. The teaching materials are usually selected at his discretion. The class size varies from department to department, ranging from 20- 40 students.

Therefore, the main problem of this article can be formulated as follows: the role of positive psychology in English foreign language classroom. In connection to the main problem, the research questions are: 1) how do the lecturers implement positive psychology in the language learning activities by describing its main principles that enable the students to use English for communication? 2) How do lecturers design learning activities? 3) How do students and lecturers play their roles in English foreign language oriented towards the development of students' communicative competence?

Literature Review

The psychological approach can be defined as certain theoretical and believed psychological assumptions, which relate to self-teaching and the nature of learning. From a psychological perspective,

there are many different views regarding learning, including language learning. Learning a foreign language is a process of mastering a good language. In psychology, there are specific approaches used in learning foreign languages, namely behaviorism, humanism, and construction (Hansen, J. T., 2007).

Gratitude is an attitude that pays more attention and values life positively. Gratitude manifests from two stages of processing information. First, the individual needs to have awareness about positive experiences, and then connect them to external sources (McCullough Kilpatrick et al., 2001). However, if gratitude is only directed towards the outside, then the conceptualization ignores other sources of gratitude that exist in everyday life. Gratitude can arise from an appreciation for one's abilities.

According to Fredrickson (2001), positive emotions can expand reflective thinking. Fredrickson (2004) also mentions that gratitude can expand innovative and reciprocal relationships (e.g., psychosocial, spiritual, and physical skills), and consequently improve individual well-being. Gratitude serves as a coping mechanism so that when someone encounters difficulties, they recall pleasant memories that allow them to divert their attention from a pattern of lack of appreciation (Watkins, 2004).

In developing gratitude, several interventions have been developed to prove the physical and psychological benefits that can be obtained from gratitude. These interventions are categorized into behavioral expressions of gratitude, gratitude, and gratitude lists (Wood et al., 2010).

Most of the Islamic education in Indonesia supports the idea of positive psychology (PP), not to mention in the English foreign language curriculum. Involving PP in the practice of English language teaching is considered essential because this subject is commonly believed to provide the learners the opportunity for direct contact with the foreign people.

In delivering the materials, lecturers are allowed to improvise to be more easily understood by students. However, students often have low motivation, complain too much, feel ungrateful, and have more negative feelings in dealing with various problems. If these things are not resolved immediately, students may grow physically or grow older but are less mature in developing themselves to face the future and become part of a civilized nation (Tarihoran et al., 2019). Therefore, the authors are inspired to implement positive aspects of psychology to improve students' abilities in developing their personality.

However, the practice of EFL teaching, especially English for conversation, is mostly carried out without self-confidence. English educators are essentially required not only to teach the language but also to display the context in which the language is utilized. Also, the students need to learn both the language and the culture of the society who use the language. This is especially common in the practice of a foreign language teaching since to be able to communicate

using a foreign language actively, one needs to have not only a good proficiency of the language but also a decent understanding of its culture.

The focus of language teaching now is what the students learn or need to learn instead of what is to be taught. As many classrooms are more student-centered, the opinions and the initiatives of the students will bring a significant contribution to the class. Since a person is shaped by one's culture, it can be assumed that the importance of cultural context in language teaching will be higher as learning becomes more learner-centered. It is related to this move of accentuation from teaching and towards learning that there has appeared a growing awareness of the role played by culture in the classroom (Sowden, 2007). It is not only the learners that come with their own culture in the classroom, but the teachers also bring their own culture. This is especially true if the language teacher is not from the area. Sowden reminds the teacher, "to be aware not only of the cultures of their students and their environment but also of the cultures that they bring to the classroom".

It is critical to discover the connection between language and psychology. Foreign language infrequently manages this point despite the importance of human and social components in language learning. Numerous language instructors know about the significance of improving students' attitudes toward language learning by inspiring them to maintain consistency, flexibility, and positive feelings fundamental for their learning. Moreover, educators generally perceive the fundamental elements among students and instructors, particularly in settings in which correspondence and significant communications are foregrounded (Tarihoran, 2017).

Sonja Lyubomirsky (2005), a researcher from University of California Riverside identified "Eight steps toward a more satisfying life," which include: 1) Remember good things in your life, 2) Do good things, 3) Say "thank you" to people who helped you, 4) Take time for your friends and family, 5) Forgive people who hurt you, 6) Take care of your body and health, 7) Notice good things as they happen, and 8) Learn to work with your problems and stress.

Seligman (2011) offers the PERMA model by giving a progressively comprehensive perspective on prosperity. PERMA stands for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement. Although positive brain research on language exercises displayed in this section relates to a particular part of a positive feeling, they also represent different parts of the PERMA model. For example, Lyubomirsky's can be adapted in the EFL teaching materials.

For many language educators, one of the goals is to foster the positivity of learners' educational experiences and support them in reaching their highest levels of achievement and success (Fredrickson, 2001). For this reason, we feel that studying the positive role of psychology in the classrooms or other the language

environment will provide a valuable addition to the current perspective on the learning process.

Method

The subjects were undergraduate students in an Islamic education class in the second semester of the 2018 academic year at *Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin* Banten, the State Islamic University in Indonesia. The purpose of using PP in English subjects is to explore the positive psychology and learning activities in the study of language by describing its main principles as it relates to the core subject of Islamic studies. The study was conducted using an exploratory approach in which data were collected through in-depth interviews with 6 (six) English lecturers, and questionnaires distributed to 60 (sixty) students.

This research conducted with the primary purpose of exploring what the learners and lecturers do in the English classroom and to what extent EFL has motivated them in their learning process. Eligible participants were students from a university in Indonesia, between the age of 18–21, able to read and write in English; recruited via online Facebook group and the face-to-face approach. To minimize unintended variation in the procedure, both approaches utilized standard instructions that participants read themselves.

Table 1. Summary of Questions

No	Nature of collected data	Justification	Items
1	Age, gender, students details parents job/level of education	socio-economic effects	3
2	Stress, depression, anxiety	health troubles	3
3	Sleep	Previously identified factor affecting mental health	2
4	Number of hours watching television per day	Factor potentially affecting the well-being	2
5	Subjective and psychological well-being (validated on students)	To measure PERMA dimensions	2
6	Motivation types (self-determination theory)	Identified factor affecting mental health and well-being	2

Results

1. The Islamic Education Department

Islamic Education is one of the many public higher learning institutions in Indonesia that provides various degrees from different disciplines, including Islamic teacher education. The Islamic Education (PAI) of UIN offers teaching degree programs, including professional development, with the emphasis on free-service teachers for Islamic schools. Most students who graduated from PAI with a B.A (Islamic education) will eventually be Islamic education teachers. The following courses have been initiated and established by the Islamic Education management.

Table 2: Courses in English Programs

No	Course	Level
1	Basic English	General English
2	English for conversation	Intermediate Level
3	English for Islamic Studies	Upper-intermediate

Based on an interview with lecturers and documentation analysis, the researchers found that the syllabus has been tailored to learner's needs using positive psychology. In this department, the learners

have more chances to use English in everyday communication.

The first thing to do before lecturers teaching EFL is reviewing the PP Program, which is the first empirical study of a Positive Psychology curriculum for students. The positive psychology assesses students' needs to make sure that the students learn what they need to learn.

Secondly, the significant objectives of the positive psychology program are 1) to assist the students in recognizing their personal qualities, and 2) to use these qualities in everyday life. The program targets qualities (e.g., consideration, boldness, insight, persistence) that are written in the expected learning outcome.

The educational plan comprises of around 50-80-minute sessions taught in more than one semester. Most exercises include the discourse of personal qualities (or other positive ideas and abilities), classroom activities, and homework, that urge students to apply ideas and aptitudes in their very own lives, and a subsequent diary reflection.

2. Positive Psychology in EFL

Similar to the ideas in Lyubomirsky's list, the items in the PERMA model also have applicability for Islamic education in teaching EFL classroom.

1. **Positive Emotion** (PE). Lyubomirsky's unique rundown manages this aspect, so the "satisfaction/positive feelings" exercises in this section all work on positive feelings.
2. **Engagement** (E). This incorporates rationally and sincerely captivating the students. This is regularly done by encouraging them to say *Thank You to the World.*
3. **Relationships**(R). Positive therapists study the importance of connections. As educators, our significant role is to make a connection with our students.
4. **Meaning** (M). This is done by teaching the students to write *Compliments* and *Gratitude letter*
5. **Achievement** (A), as described in the expected learning outcomes

Table 3. PERMA model

No	PERMA	Expressions
1	Positive Emotion	Satisfaction/positive feelings
2	Engagement	Thank You to the World (*Syukron,* in Arabic)
3	Relationships	Don't *smile* until the second semester
4	Meaning	*Compliments* and *Gratitude letter*
5	Achievement	Goal setting

3. Nature of collected data

Being Muslim educators, lecturers feel that it is essential to make an effort to incorporate PP in all subjects taught at every educational level. They believe that instilling PP could help EFL students to develop better in the real world. The collected data can be seen in Table 4.

We start with "*Recollect beneficial things throughout your life*" by asking students to write a *Journal Diary* or *Gratitude Journals*. Every once a week, students recall things they are thankful for in the

earlier week, then make a video to record them. By doing so, they recall and rationally re-experience those positive encounters and feelings. Seligman et al. (2005) recommend that when doing "*remember your good fortune*" assignments, students acknowledge the positive occasion, including "why" it occurred. This gives further language practice and is a decent talk procedure too.

Table 4. Collected Data

No	Nature of collected data	Results
1	Age	18-19 years
2	Gender	40(F), 20 (M)
3	Parent's education	SHS (56%)
3	Stress, depression, anxiety	Anxiety(40%)
4	Number of hours watching television per day	2 hours
5	Subjective and psychological well-being (validated on students)	happiness
6	Motivation types (self-determination theory)	extrinsic

Conclusion

The success or failure of EFL teaching in the context of Islamic education is influenced by many factors. One of the crucial factors is the method and strategies of teaching EFL in the classroom. Lecturers must modify their method of instruction by adopting PP approaches in language learning.

We conclude that where possible, well-being should be taught in school on three grounds: as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking. The potential contributions of positive psychology are contextualized concerning prior work, including the humanistic movement in language teaching, models of motivation, the concept of an effective filter, studies of the good language learner, and the concepts related to the self. There are reasons for both encouragement and caution, as studies inspired by positive psychology are undertaken.

It is expected that the students could both achieve foreign language skills and, at the same time, become more effective learners. It is based not only on the basic principles of teaching language but also on the application of the principle of positive psychology because teaching often relates to mental aspects. The implications of the study provide several valuable insights into the expectations of the EFL classroom.

The EFL field may be in a powerful position to engage with PP to produce innovative thinking. We hope that this research will be a stepping-stone for further study of the themes discussed, with meticulous concepts and methodology, and new interventions in language learning institutions, but not limited to classrooms and schools.

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