

## Assessing Emotions in Learning English as a Second Language Among Pre- Service Teachers

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### Abstract

Despite having learned English in both primary and secondary school, Malaysian students still struggle to speak the language fluently. The aspect of emotion in English language learning is normally overlooked which is why this study was conducted. The aim of this paper is to assess the emotions of pre-service teachers when learning the English language specifically speaking and listening skills. This study applied a quantitative approach where an online questionnaire was distributed to 120 pre-service teachers across Malaysia. The research instrument was adapted from the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ). There are 6 emotions involved, which consist of three positive emotions (enjoyment, hope, pride), and three negative emotions (shame, anger, boredom, anxiety). The findings of this research show that the dominant positive emotion experienced by the pre-service teacher is hope. Whereas the dominant negative emotion encountered by them is anxiety. From the finding, the level of anxiety in learning speaking skills is higher than that of listening skills. This research also highlights the role of educators in making sure the emotional state of the classroom does not obstruct the students' learning process. This research also argues that not all negative emotions hinder learning as learners are able to perceive them as positive in their language learning process. Studies on emotions in learning the English language are still inadequate and should be looked into more in the future. The findings from such studies will be able to help educators and English language learners to better understand the aspect of emotion when teaching and learning the language and how to use emotions to their advantage.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Language, Learning, Hope, Anxiety

### Introduction

The importance of mastering the English language cannot be denied and ignored especially in today's era of information and technology. Since English is the most widely spoken language in the world, it is crucial to acquire the language in order to compete in this globalized world (Rao, 2019). Being proficient in English will open doors to new and more opportunities in the job market and has become an essential skill that future employers sought after. Emotions

has a pivotal role in English language learning. According to S. Abd Rahim (2010), the emotional side of human behavior in second language learning is important. According to Pekrun (2002), emotional encounters have had a profound impact on the motivation of language learners. Both positive and negative emotions have a major effect on the motivation of language learners, as they can trigger or deactivate motivational behaviors. Supporting the emotions of students in language learning settings will help students deal with feelings inherent in language learning experiences and develop a positive attitude towards themselves as language learners (López, 2011).

MacIntyre (2002) stated, in the language learning literature, emotion has not been given adequate attention, with the exception of language anxiety studies. Furthermore, according to a research, one of the key issues in foreign language teaching is, the emotional aspect is always overlooked, resulting in relatively emotion-free (and therefore often boring) classroom sessions (Dewaele, 2005, 2011a). While the negative emotions of students such as stress and language learning anxiety and have been widely researched, positive feelings have scarcely been studied (Mohammadipour et al., 2018). Pekrun (2006), and Schunk (2008), suggest that positive emotions like enjoyment, hope, and pride are associated with higher academic achievement and negative emotions such as anger, shame, and boredom are associated with lower achievement. In past researches, positive emotions are said to be connected to learners' tendency to play, explore, and establish relationships (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012); increased attention and motivation to learn (Schunk, 2008) and the employment of flexible, deep and creative learning strategies (Pekrun, 2014). Whereas negative emotions minimize learners' academic achievement, because they reduce concentration, comprehension, and effort (Pekrun, 2014). Various studies have shown that positive emotions are linked to the cognition and behaviors of learners (e.g., Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010; Rusk & Waters, 2013). Because of recent advances in second language learning, studies have increased the need to research positive emotions in and of themselves and in relation to the use of language learning strategies (Mohammadipour et al., 2018). Aside from that, Gregersen & MacIntyre (2014), also clarifies that negative feelings are not necessarily disadvantageous, as they can assist students to eliminate an interference, however they can be petrifying. According to them, positive emotions "can broaden the field of attention and build resources for the future" and aid learners "to build relationships, personal strength, and tolerances for the moments when things become difficult".

The teacher and classroom environment play an important role in developing students' interest. MacIntyre (2016) claims that enjoyment of foreign languages is a desirable emotion that serves as an incentive for the learning process, as it results in higher academic performance, enhances motivation and can play a defensive role against negative emotions. In order to achieve enjoyment in the classroom, teachers should create fun and interactive activities that all students can participate in. Additionally, Ross & Stracke (2016), study points to the need for pedagogical applications that set the conditions for language learners to feel more pride in the classroom (especially authentic pride). According to them, these pedagogical applications would necessarily be focused on accomplishment and achievement and may involve interventions such as shorter, more achievable tasks in which learners easily acknowledge the successful completion of tasks. Furthermore, Ross & Rivers (2018), mentioned that in second language learning, hope is also important, and can be found in motivational theories such as the L2 motivational self-system of Dörnyei's, that relies heavily on the image of a hoped-for, or desired, future self.

Aside from positive emotions, negative emotions can also affect students' English language

learning. Anxiety is one of the negative emotions that frequently haunts students. Khattak et al. (2011), stated that anxiety in English language learning can be crippling and can affect the students' achievement of their goals. If a student in the classroom feels stressed, the likelihood of getting a stressful and unpleasant foreign language experience increases (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). According to Elkhafaifi (2005), students who are anxious tend to avoid voluntary responses and involvement in oral exercises and avoid communicating in the classroom. This is why teachers need to be creative in designing lesson plans and classroom activities. Other than anxiety, another common negative emotion experienced by English language learners is humiliation. According to Ng et al. (2018), the feeling of shame is not supposed to happen in any learning process; however, the memories of the participants in their study show that they felt humiliated after being physically punished, publicly criticized or jeered at. Teachers need to create a supportive environment in their classrooms to make sure students know that it is okay to make mistakes in the process of learning the English language. Furthermore, while boredom is one of the most commonly encountered feelings in the foreign and second language classroom, compared to emotions, such as anxiety, joy or interest, little empirical attention has been given to it so far (Pawlak et al. 2020). Teachers who prefer to ascribe boredom to student laziness, anxiety, depression or personality factors have often understood and trivialized boredom (Macklem, 2015). Zawodniak et al. (2017), also reported that monotonous tasks, disengaged and/or unsupportive teachers, as well as being too overwhelmed with the content taught, may be the cause of students' boredom. Again, and again it has been proven that teachers need to play their part in making sure that their classroom environment is engaging and supportive in order to make students develop a keen interest towards improving their English.

To truly master the English language, learners are expected to learn all the four skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to Arabi Zanjani & Izadpanah (2016), learners are required to have these four skills to be regarded as language learners and these four skills are also closely connected and are not able to work independently. According to Sadiku (2015), listening skills and speaking skills are highly interrelated and work simultaneously in real life situations. This claim is also supported by Ziane (2011), who states that listening has a significant effect on the development of speaking skills. Meaning that it is impossible for learners to develop their speaking ability without developing their listening skill as well. Therefore, educators should pay the same level of attention to the development of the four language skills in order for the teaching and learning of English to be successful.

This research focuses on two English language skills which are speaking skills and listening skills. This is because for most English language learners, speaking skills is considered as the most difficult skill to master. Rababa'h (2005), states that there are many contributing factors that cause difficulties in speaking English and some of the factors are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. As for listening skills, the most common troubles faced by language learners are straight away forgetting what is heard, not recognizing the words they know, understanding the message but not the intended message, neglecting the next part while thinking about meaning and not able to form a mental representation from words heard (Goh, 2000).

### **Research Purpose**

The aim of this research is to determine the dominant positive and negative emotion encountered by Malaysian pre-service teachers, in learning English as a Second Language (ESL), specifically when learning speaking and listening skills. This study emphasizes on six

positive and negative emotions which are enjoyment, pride, hope, anxiety, humiliation and also boredom. From this study, we are able to identify which of these six emotions are dominant among the pre-service teachers when learning the English language. Furthermore, the findings can also help educators out there to reflect their teaching strategies in teaching the English language and perhaps assist them in managing their students' emotions in the classroom.

### **Literature Review**

Emotions act as an essential role the understanding of student learning and achievement (e.g., Govaerts & Grégoire, 2008; Pekrun, 2006; Weiner, 2010). However, in second language learning, emotions, except for language anxiety, were not fully featured in the language learning studies. In the field of linguistic studies, the claims regarding emotion as the key motivating base require more and even greater focus. MacIntyre (2002), emphasized that in language learning literature, the motivational properties of emotion have been severely underestimated. In order to pay greater attention to emotional communication and the growth of socio-cultural competence in a second language, Dewaele (2005) calls for further studies based on affect and emotion.

According to Pekrun et al. (2002), academic emotions such as enjoyment, pride, boredom and hopelessness, are a few emotions encountered in an academic atmosphere and are connected to the learning, teaching, and achievement of students. Research from Pekrun (2006), and Schunk (2008), indicates that higher academic achievement is correlated with positive emotions such as happiness, hope, and pride, and negative emotions such as frustration, guilt, and boredom are associated with lower achievement. In Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), where they considered the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among 1746 FL learners from all over the world, the importance role of both positive and negative emotions in foreign language learning emerged. Although it is generally believed that anxiety can result in negative outcomes for second language learners, other emotional factors may also affect the achievement of second language learning (Lay Shi et al., 2018). Positive emotions are also proven to help students in overcoming challenges and difficulties in English learning. One kind of positive emotion which is enjoyment is assumed to assist second language learners to better attend to, process and develop a target language (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

In a research conducted by Mendez (2011), it is found that a student felt very happy and motivated throughout the day when the teacher complimented on her performance in class. Furthermore, according to some evidence, second language learners with a more promotional emphasis appear to show more optimistic feelings about their own learning experience, peers and teachers (Teimouri, 2016). When Mendez (2011), conducted a research on English language learners in Mexico, she discovered that the emotions frequently mentioned by the 24 university students were fear, worry, sadness, happiness, calm, and excitement. According to her, this is an important discovery, because most studies on affect "focus on a single negative emotion such as anxiety and overlook the diversity of students' experiences and emotions" (Barcelos, 2015). Furthermore, Mendez has also successfully identified five main origins of students' emotions which were their insecurity about their speaking proficiency, comparisons with classmates, the type of learning activity, the teacher's attitude, and the classroom environment. Teacher's attitude and classroom environment are proven to have the most impact on students' motivation.

Furthermore, negative emotions diminish learners' academic achievement, because they

minimize concentration, understanding, and effort (Pekrun, 2014). Even though negative emotions can be considered detrimental to learning foreign languages, there is a study that proves negative emotions act as enhancers of learning. According to Mendez Lopez & Pea Aguilar (2013), Mexican students treat negative emotions as tools for English language learning and they responded to these negative classroom experiences as an initiative to realize what they were doing wrong and how to improve their skills. Aside from that, the insecurity and the thought of learning English as a demanding task led the students to develop language learning awareness and learning strategies while at the same time driving them to utilize motivational strategies to encourage themselves, thus boosting their motivation to learn.

Additionally, English speaking skill is considered one of the most difficult skills to master. Students often experience anxiety when they are required to speak in English. A research by Zhiping & Paramasivam (2013), found that one of the issues shared by Iranian and Algerian students in the classroom as a cause of anxiety is their negative feeling about speaking with errors and not being able to find the correct and suitable words to say. Elkhafaifi (2005) further stated in his research that, anxious learners prefer to avoid voluntary responses and engagement in oral exercises and to avoid communicating in the classroom. A study on English language speaking anxiety conducted among Malaysian undergraduates, showed that communication apprehension is the main contributing factor in speaking anxiety among these learners (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019). This implies that the students feel overly aware of and sensitive to attention when they are asked to speak in front of the class. According to Misdam & Saidalvi (2019), this discovery is in accordance with a research done by McCroskey (1992), which found that most language learners experienced communication apprehension when they are required to speak in a formal situation in front of a group of people.

Listening skill on the other hand is an important factor in English language acquisition. In second language learning, listening is important since it offers information for the learner. Without understanding the information at the right level, any learning will simply not begin (Yildirim, S., & Yildirim, O. 2016). As reported by Jamilah (2017), anxiety in listening to foreign languages is one of the significant variables influencing success and failure in learning foreign languages. In a research conducted by Tahsildar & Yusoff (2014), the results revealed that anxiety experienced by students was mostly due to insufficient background knowledge especially related to new vocabulary and the content of the listening text, lack of repetition when listening to listening text, unfamiliar English pronunciation, speech rate and low level of confidence. Hence, it is important for teachers to make sure that the listening text chosen is compatible with students' level of proficiency and covers familiar topics that they can relate to.

Méndez (2011), claimed that the two key factors described as having an impact on the emotional experiences of students are: the behaviors of teachers and the environment of the classroom. If English language teachers have a healthy self-respect and trust in themselves, it will significantly affect their target language teaching and the achievement of learners in the target language (Salwa, 2017). It is known that teachers with negative emotions are prone to minimize the probability of learners using a deeper level of cognitive learning methods (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2011). According to Addisu (2020), the learning environment such as teacher's teaching techniques, arrangement of seats, size and cleanliness of the class, determined the effectiveness of the language learning process. It is safe to say that students' attitudes tend to be negative if these things are not good despite the fact that they like the English language. Therefore, teachers are responsible for controlling the emotional atmosphere of the classroom and creating a positive as well as healthy environment among

the second language learners as this can result in a strong connection among peers and also the teacher. Before you begin to format your paper, first write and save the content as a separate text file. Keep your text and graphic files separate until after the text has been formatted and styled. Do not use hard tabs, and limit use of hard returns to only one return at the end of a paragraph. Do not add any kind of pagination anywhere in the paper. Do not number text heads—the template will do that for you. Finally, complete content and organizational editing before formatting. Please take note of the following items when proofreading spelling and grammar:

### **Methodology**

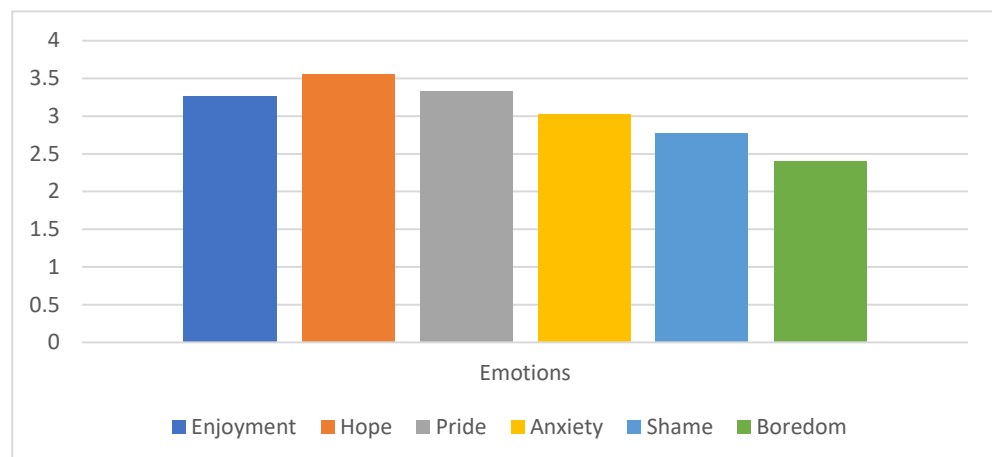
The aim of this research is to determine the dominant positive and negative emotion encountered by Malaysian pre-service teachers, in learning English as a Second Language (ESL). This research used a quantitative approach where an online questionnaire was distributed to 120 pre-service teachers across Malaysia. This research instrument was adapted from the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) (Pekrun et al., 2005), to determine the pre-service teachers' emotions in learning ESL specifically when learning listening and speaking skills. This instrument consists of three sections, the first section which is Section A is a set of questions regarding the respondents' demographics. Section B is composed of 20 items that measure the positive (enjoyment, hope, pride) and negative (anxiety, embarrassment, boredom) emotions when learning speaking skills. Whereas Section C, consist of 20 items that measure the same positive and negative emotions when learning listening skills. The questionnaire was scored on a four-point Likert scale which is labelled as, 4- Strongly Agree, 3-Agree, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree, adapted from Wiersma, 2000. A four-point Likert scale was used because specific responses from respondents were required in this study. The alpha coefficient for all the items is .943, which indicates excellent reliability value according to Sekaran & Bougie, 2010.

### **Results**

#### **Demographics**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Sex (%)</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Sports and Recreation	<b>19</b>	<b>35</b>
Special Education	<b>5</b>	<b>40</b>

## Emotions in Learning English Speaking Skills

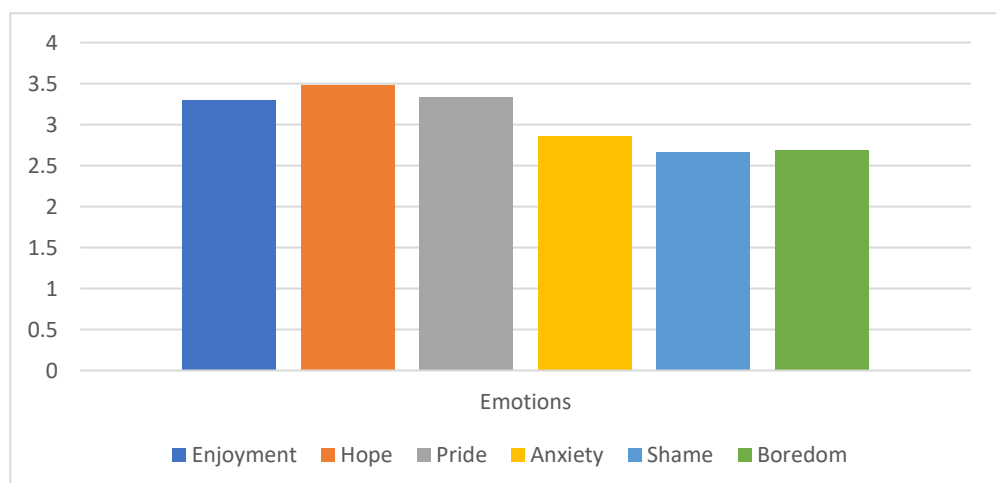


**Figure 1.** *Emotions in Learning English Speaking Skills.*

Figure 1 depicts the descriptive analysis of positive emotions (enjoyment, hope, and pride) and negative emotions (anxiety, shame, and boredom) in learning speaking skills. The findings portray that enjoyment has a mean of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 0.497, followed by hope (mean = 3.56, SD = 0.467) and pride (mean = 3.33, SD = 0.444). This result shows that the most dominant positive emotion experienced by the pre-service teachers in learning speaking skills is hope whereas the least dominant positive emotion is enjoyment.

As for the negative emotions in learning speaking skills, the result indicates that anxiety has a mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 0.723, followed by shame (mean = 2.78, SD = 0.674) and boredom (mean = 2.41, SD = 0.747). This depicts that the most dominant negative emotion encountered by the pre-service teachers in learning speaking skills is anxiety whereas the least dominant is boredom.

## Emotions in Learning English Listening Skills



**Figure 2.** *Emotions in Learning English Listening Skills.*

Figure 2 represents the descriptive analysis of positive emotions (enjoyment, hope, and pride) and negative emotions (anxiety, shame, and boredom) in learning listening skills. The results portray that enjoyment has a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.481, followed by hope (mean = 3.48, SD = 0.474) and pride (mean = 3.34, SD = 0.498). It can be concluded from

the findings that the most dominant positive emotion when learning listening skill is also hope and the least dominant is again enjoyment.

As for the negative emotions in learning listening skills, the findings show that anxiety has a mean of 2.86 and a standard deviation of 0.692, followed by shame (mean = 2.67, SD = 0.706) and boredom (mean = 2.69, SD = 0.799). From this analysis, it can be seen that the most dominant negative emotion when it comes to learning listening skills is also anxiety and the least dominant is shame.

### Discussion

Based on the findings, when it comes to learning speaking skills, hope is the most dominant positive emotion encountered by the pre-service teachers. In a research conducted by Ross & Rivers (2018), the emotion of hope experienced by university students, in relation to English language use in the future is closely linked with their desire to be able to use the language proficiently. Furthermore, according to them, the feeling of hope, however, is not in any way related to their learning environment, but to their possible future ability to have a confident and effective conversation in genuine communicative contexts with foreigners. In this study, the questions asked in the questionnaire regarding the emotion hope are related to participants' ability to use the English language more confidently in the future, such as, a) *I hope I am able to speak confidently in the future*, b) *I hope I can speak fluently with correct grammar in the future* and c) *I hope I can pronounce words correctly while speaking in the future*. It is clear here that the emotion hope felt by the pre-service teachers during speaking activities does not depend solely on the classroom environment or the learning methods and materials, but instead it is influenced by their aspiration to achieve excellent English proficiency in the future. Dörnyei's (2009), motivational theory, L2 motivational self-system, also emphasized on the emotion of hope, in which it depends crucially on the vision of a hoped-for, or desired, future self. In the case of this study, based on the results, the pre-service teachers visualize a future where they are fluent in using the English language, and this vision motivates them to learn and master the language.

Additionally, the findings also show that anxiety is the dominant negative emotion in learning speaking skills. From the result we can also see that the level of anxiety in learning speaking skills is higher than that of listening skills. This is due to the fact that the pre-service teachers feel shy and self-conscious when they are required to speak English in front a large audience. The fear of making grammatical mistakes and not being able to speak fluently are factors that trigger the anxiety. Suleimenova (2013) reported that in recent years the concern about communication skills among second or foreign language learners may cause a high level of speech anxiety. In his research, foreign language learners acknowledged that when learning to communicate using the target language, they felt overwhelming, nervous and anxious and said they have a "mental block" towards language learning. One of the questions asked in the questionnaire was, *it is hard for me to produce and deliver my ideas when I am nervous*, the pre-service teachers start to feel immense nervousness and they will find it difficult to convey their ideas effectively, hence why the level of anxiety is higher when learning English speaking skills. Furthermore, according to Chan, Abdullah and Yusof (2012), tertiary-level Malaysian learners experience communication apprehension (anxiety when communicating with others) because the instruction provided in the classroom by the instructor is excessive, making the lesson fully controlled by the instructor. This can have a detrimental effect on students in the development of automatic and spontaneous responses due to the lack of transfer of the skills acquired in the classroom. In the case of this study, the pre-service



teachers do not have much opportunity to use English in the classroom as the lesson is always dominated by their instructors. Due to the lack of exposure, they are not used to communicating among their peers and this makes it hard for them to develop unprompted responses.

Aside from that, for listening skills, the most dominant positive and negative emotion is also hope and anxiety. Listening anxiety is mostly due to learners' lack of background knowledge particularly of new vocabulary and new facts in the listening text, lack of repetition when listening to the text, unfamiliar pronunciation, speech rate and low level of self-confidence (Tahsildar & Yusoff, 2014). Based on the statements stated in the questionnaire, the pre-service teachers agree with the following statements, *a) I become nervous if the listening audio is about something I have never heard of or experienced, b) I get nervous when the listening audio is in an unfamiliar accent, and c) I get nervous when the speaker in the listening audio is talking too fast.* The findings show that the pre-service teachers find the listening text too difficult to understand due to the unfamiliar accent that produces unfamiliar English pronunciation and is speaking too fast. Besides that, the listening text used during English lessons sometimes covers topics that learners cannot relate to or do not have the background knowledge of. This makes them more nervous when participating in listening activities.

However, the results also depict that hope is the dominant positive emotion when it comes to learning listening skills. The Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotions suggests that positive emotional experiences hinder the damaging effect of negative emotions. This theory has five core propositions and the second proposition states that positive emotions make learners feel good, and helps them cope with negative emotions. Therefore, from the research findings, even though the pre-service teachers experience anxiety when learning listening skills, the feeling of hope is there to help them overcome their listening anxiety in class and further motivates them to improve their listening skills. Based on the questionnaire, the pre-service teachers strongly agree with the following statements, *a) I hope I am able to enhance my listening skills, b) I hope I can apply the strategies I learned in class in real situations, and c) I hope I can master the listening skills.* Even though the pre-service teachers experienced listening anxiety, the emotion hope is able to motivate them and assist them in conquering their listening anxiety.

Hope and anxiety are the two dominant emotions experienced by the pre-service teachers in learning ESL specifically in speaking and listening skills, how can educators use these two emotions to improve learners' language learning experience? Since, anxiety is a negative emotion, teachers need to provide a classroom environment that can lessen the feeling of anxiety in students and enhance the feeling of hope. For an instance, during English speaking activities, instead of asking students to deliver a speech in front of the whole class, teachers should create activities where students are given the opportunity to develop their speaking skills in small, supportive groups with their peers. Besides that, teachers should also create a classroom environment where students feel safe to make mistakes. Many language learners believe that teachers' authoritative, humiliating attitude towards students, especially when they make mistakes, can have serious implications for the cognition of learners and their ability to communicate in the classroom (Hashemi, 2011). Therefore, teachers should provide constructive feedbacks instead of interrupting and correcting students while they are carrying out the activities to avoid high level of anxiety among students. Aside from that, the teachers should also make sure that the learning materials and activities in their English language class are compatible with all students. For instance, in selecting listening texts for listening activity, teachers should choose suitable listening texts that is appropriate to learners' level because

it will help students to conquer their anxiety. Furthermore, anxiety, if well-managed, can bring out positive outcomes in English language learning. Based on a study conducted by Hayasaki (2018), instead of only trying to minimize anxiety, this study suggests that language learners harness the feelings of stress and that language teachers assist learners in setting specific and achievable targets to improve their motivation and build strength to resolve obstacles. Hence, educators play an important role in helping students manage and transform their anxiety into something positive. In the case of this study, the emotion of anxiety, should be used to enhance the feeling of hope among the pre-service teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Emotions are essential in English language learning. In this research, it is found that the dominant positive emotion in learning both speaking and listening skills is the emotion of hope. Whereas the dominant negative emotion in learning these two skills is anxiety. The findings also show that the emotion hope and anxiety is higher in learning speaking skills than that of listening skills. This is because speaking skills is the most difficult skill to master and require a lot of additional skills and knowledge in order for language learners to achieve native-like fluency. Having said that, it does not mean that educators should abandon the development of other language skills like listening skills. Educators should pay attention to the progress of all the four language skills in order for learners to be proficient English users. Furthermore, this study proves that teachers play a vital role in providing a classroom environment that fosters motivation so that students do not feel discouraged to explore the English language and lose their confidence or enthusiasm when learning the English language and that negative emotions are not always bad and can be utilized by educators and also learners to produce positive outcomes in the teaching and learning process. The findings also imply that educators should transform their teaching methods and approaches to ones that can lower the damaging effects of negative emotions like anxiety, and increase the advantageous effects of positive emotions like hope and lessen the detrimental effects of the anxiety.

In conclusion, it is found that studies regarding emotions in learning English speaking and listening skills are still lacking and should be looked into more in the future. The findings gained from such studies are surely able to help educators and learners to understand the aspect of emotion in English language learning and also assist educators to construct a more effective English teaching strategies and approaches that are not destructive to their learner's emotions.

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