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Fostering Joyful Engagement: Integrating Positive Psychology Activities in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Classrooms for Non-English Majors

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ABSTRACT

Traditional ESP instruction for non-English majors often neglects affective factors, exacerbating anxiety and disengagement in contexts like Indonesian Islamic higher education. This study addresses this gap by integrating Positive Psychology (PP) activities into an ESP course for Sharia Economics students. An explanatory sequential mixedmethods design was employed with all 17 students in the cohort. Quantitative data (pre-/post-questionnaires, language tests, structured observations) measured changes in joyful engagement and discipline-specific language skills. Qualitative data (interviews, reflective journals) explored experiential insights. Analysis used paired t-tests, correlations, and thematic analysis. PP activities generated statistically significant increases in joyful engagement – AEQ Enjoyment Δ = +1.37; observed enthusiasm +338%) and language acquisition (vocabulary +13.53%, text comprehension +14.12%, presentation skills +15.29%; all p < 0.001. A strong correlation emerged between joy and learning gains (r =0.72). Qualitatively, students highlighted reduced anxiety, enhanced relevance through Islamic economic scenarios, such as zakat negotiations, and cultural-religious synergy gratitude as shukr. Joy-centered pedagogy, grounded in PP principles and contextualized within Islamic values, proves highly effective in transforming ESP learning for non-English majors. It reduces affective barriers, fosters meaningful engagement, and accelerates discipline-specific language proficiency. This study provides a replicable model for affective ESP pedagogies in religious Indonesian higher education, prioritizing both academic rigor and holistic development.

Keywords: Joyful Learning, Positive Psychology, ESP, Non-English Majors, Islamic Higher Education.

ABSTRAK

Pengajaran ESP tradisional untuk jurusan non-bahasa Inggris sering mengabaikan faktor afektif, memperburuk kecemasan dan pelepasan dalam konteks seperti pendidikan tinggi Islam Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengatasi kesenjangan ini dengan mengintegrasikan kegiatan Psikologi Positif (PP) ke dalam mata kuliah ESP untuk mahasiswa Ekonomi Syariah. Desain metode campuran berurutan penjelasan digunakan dengan semua 17 siswa dalam kohort. Data kuantitatif (kuesioner pra/pasca, tes bahasa, pengamatan terstruktur) mengukur perubahan keterlibatan yang menyenangkan dan keterampilan bahasa khusus disiplin. Data kualitatif (wawancara, jurnal reflektif) mengeksplorasi wawasan pengalaman. Analisis menggunakan uji-t berpasangan, korelasi, dan analisis tematik. Kegiatan PP menghasilkan peningkatan yang signifikan secara statistik dalam

keterlibatan yang menyenangkan (misalnya, Kenikmatan AEQ Δ = +1,37; antusiasme yang diamati +338%) dan pemerolehan bahasa (kosakata +13,53%, pemahaman teks +14,12%, keterampilan presentasi +15,29%; semua p < 0,001). Korelasi yang kuat muncul antara kegembiraan dan keuntungan belajar (r = 0,72). Secara kualitatif, siswa menyoroti pengurangan kecemasan, peningkatan relevansi melalui skenario ekonomi Islam (misalnya, negosiasi zakat), dan sinergi budaya-agama (misalnya, rasa syukur sebagai shukr). Pedagogi yang berpusat pada kegembiraan, didasarkan pada prinsip-prinsip PP dan dikontekstualisasikan dalam nilai-nilai Islam, terbukti sangat efektif dalam mengubah pembelajaran ESP untuk jurusan non-Inggris. Ini mengurangi hambatan afektif, menumbuhkan keterlibatan yang bermakna, dan mempercepat kemahiran bahasa khusus disiplin. Penelitian ini memberikan model yang dapat direplikasi untuk pedagogi ESP afektif dalam pendidikan tinggi Indonesia yang religius, mengutamakan ketelitian akademik dan pengembangan holistik.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Menyenangkan, Psikologi Positif, ESP, Jurusan Non-Bahasa Inggris, Pendidikan Tinggi Keislaman.

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is increasingly indispensable in globalized higher education and professional fields, particularly in specialized domains such as Islamic economics. For non-English majors at Indonesian institutions such as the Sharia Economics program at STAI Auliaurrasyidin Tembilahan, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses aim to equip students with discipline-relevant communication skills. However, traditional ESP instruction often prioritizes linguistic accuracy and technical vocabulary over affective factors, potentially neglecting students' emotional engagement (Dörnyei, 2009). This oversight is critical, as affective barriers including anxiety and low motivation-frequently hinder language acquisition among non-specialists (Horwitz, 2001). Integrating principles from Positive Psychology, which emphasizes human flourishing and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), presents a promising avenue for cultivating joyful learning environments. Such environments could transform obligatory language requirements into meaningful, engaging experiences aligned with the holistic educational values of Indonesian higher education and Islamic pedagogy.

Despite ESP's pragmatic focus, Sharia Economics students at STAI Auliaurrasyidin often exhibit passive engagement in English classes, viewing them as peripheral to their core discipline. This manifests in low participation, task avoidance, and high anxiety during speaking activities—issues compounded by generic materials lacking contextual relevance. Conventional pedagogical approaches fail to address these affective challenges, risking superficial learning outcomes and missed opportunities to leverage language as a tool for global ethical economic discourse. Consequently, there is an urgent need to explore pedagogies that merge ESP's pragmatic goals with strategies fostering intrinsic motivation and emotional resonance.

Existing scholarship provides foundational insights into affective dimensions of language learning, yet gaps persist in specialized contexts. Seligman

et al. (2009) demonstrated that Positive Psychology interventions gratitude journals, strengths identification - significantly enhanced well-being and academic performance in general education settings, suggesting transfer potential to language learning. In ESP contexts, research by Kavaliauskienė (2015) revealed that embedding discipline-specific authentic tasks increased perceived relevance and reduced anxiety among business students, though it did not explicitly measure joy as an outcome. More directly, Chang (2021) found that mindfulnessbased activities in Taiwanese university EFL classes lowered anxiety and improved willingness to communicate, yet this study focused on general English learners rather than ESP cohorts. Closer to the Indonesian context, a study by Fauziah and Nur (2022) identified motivation as a critical predictor of achievement among non-English majors but noted limited pedagogical frameworks addressing affective engagement systematically. Critically, Brown et al. (2019) argued for "pedagogies of joy" in language education, linking positive affect to cognitive retention, though their model remains untested in ESP for economics in religious higher education settings.

While prior research establishes the value of affective pedagogies, significant gaps exist: (1) No identified studies integrate Positive Psychology frameworks into ESP instruction for non-English majors in Indonesian Islamic higher education. (2) Minimal research examines the direct impact of joy-centered interventions on engagement metrics, such as participation quality, persistence, in discipline-specific language contexts. (3) Existing ESP studies in economics prioritize cognitive outcomes over affective constructs like joy, despite its theorized role in sustaining motivation. (4) Contextual nuances—such as the integration of Islamic educational values with Western-derived Positive Psychology—remain unexplored.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by investigating: (1) The design and implementation of Positive Psychology-derived activities, such as strengths-based role-plays, gratitude reflections, and accomplishment celebrations, within an ESP curriculum for Sharia Economics students. (2) The impact of these activities on students' self-reported and observed joyful engagement in English classes. (3) The relationship between joy-centered pedagogy and discipline-specific language acquisition outcomes.

By centering joy as a catalyst for meaningful ESP learning, this research contributes a contextually responsive framework to enhance language education for Indonesian non-English majors one that aligns academic rigor with holistic student flourishing.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach involved first collecting and analyzing quantitative data to measure changes in joyful engagement and language outcomes, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to provide in-depth explanations and contextual understanding of the quantitative results. This design was chosen to comprehensively address the research questions concerning both the

measurable impact and the lived experience of integrating Positive Psychology (PP) activities within the ESP context.

The population comprised all students enrolled in the English for Sharia Economics course within the Sharia Economics program at STAI Auliaurrasyidin Tembilahan for the academic semester under study. Given the specialized nature of the program and the course, the total population was 17 students. A census sampling technique was used, meaning the entire population participated in the study (n = 17). This approach was deemed appropriate due to the small, intact class size and the aim to understand the intervention's impact on this specific cohort deeply, aligning with the context-specific research gap identified (Fauziah & Nur, 2022). All participants provided informed consent. Data collection involved multiple sources:

1. Quantitative:

- a. Pre-/Post-Intervention Questionnaires: Adapted versions of validated scales were administered. Joyful engagement was measured using relevant subscales from instruments like the *Achievement Emotions Questionnaire* (AEQ) (Pekrun et al., 2011), focusing on enjoyment-related items and supplemented with items specifically related to classroom engagement behaviors, such as frequency of voluntary participation, persistence in difficult tasks. Discipline-specific language acquisition was assessed using a teacher-created test focused on course objectives (Islamic economics vocabulary, presentation skills, comprehension of relevant texts) administered pre- and post-intervention.
- b. Structured Observation Checklist: Adapted from frameworks measuring student engagement, such as Fredricks et al. (2004), this checklist was used by the researcher (and potentially a second observer for inter-rater reliability) during selected class sessions implementing PP activities. It recorded observable indicators of joyful engagement, such as frequency of smiles/laughter, active participation, visible enthusiasm, peer collaboration, and on-task behavior.

2. Qualitative:

- a. Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with a purposive sample of 6-8 students representing varying levels of initial proficiency and engagement (based on pre-questionnaire and observation). Interview guides explored students' perceptions of the PP activities, their experience of joy/engagement, perceived relevance to their field, changes in motivation/anxiety, and any connection to Islamic values.
- b. Student Reflective Journals: All participants maintained guided journals throughout the intervention period. Prompts encouraged reflection on experiences during PP activities, such as "Describe a moment in today's English activity where you felt engaged or positive. What contributed to this?" "How did the 'strengths role-play' connect to your future in Sharia Economics?" "Did any activity today feel meaningful? Why or why not?".

analysis followed sequential design. Quantitative Data the data (questionnaires, test scores, observation frequencies) analyzed were using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Paired Samples t-tests) via SPSS software (Version 28) to identify significant pre-post changes in joyful engagement scores and language performance (Pallant, 2020). Correlation analyses explored potential relationships between engagement metrics and language gains. Qualitative data (interview transcripts, reflective journals) underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) using NVivo software (Version 14). This involved familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining/naming themes, and producing the report. Themes focused on understanding how and why the PP activities influenced engagement, the nature of the joy experienced, perceived meaningfulness (especially links to Islamic Economics/values), and any challenges. The qualitative findings were then used to interpret, explain, and elaborate upon the quantitative results, providing a rich, contextualized understanding of the intervention's impact within this unique setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study employed a mixed-methods sequential design to evaluate the impact of Positive Psychology (PP) interventions on joyful engagement and discipline-specific language acquisition. Quantitative and qualitative results are synthesized below.

Quantitative Results

1. Joyful Engagement

Quantitative results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in joyful engagement following Positive Psychology interventions. Pre-post questionnaires revealed substantial increases across all indicators (p < 0.001), with the AEQ Enjoyment subscale showing the largest gain ($\Delta = +1.37$ on a 5-point Likert scale). Similarly, self-reported voluntary participation and persistence both increased by 1.41 points on a 4-point frequency scale. These self-assessment findings were corroborated by structured classroom observations, which documented a steady rise in observable joyful behaviors. Most notably, incidents of "visible enthusiasm" increased by 338% by the final observation session (Session 10), collectively indicating a pronounced positive shift in affective engagement.

Table 1: Pre-Post Changes in Joyful Engagement (n=17)

Indicator	Pre-Mean (SΓ	Post-Mean (SI	t-value	<i>p</i> -value
AEQ Enjoyment (1-5)	2.45 (0.67)	3.82 (0.54)	-7.83	< 0.001
Voluntary Participation (1-4)	1.88 (0.78)	3.29 (0.59)	-6.92	< 0.001
Persistence (1-4)	2.12 (0.83)	3.53 (0.62)	-6.15	< 0.001

Session 1 (Baseline) : (10 total incidents)
Session 5 (Mid) : (22)

Session 10 (Final) : (35)

Note: Total incidents per 30-min observation; behaviors = smiles/laughter + active participation + visible enthusiasm.

Figure 1: Observed Joyful Engagement Behaviors

2. Language Acquisition

The quantitative data revealed statistically significant improvements (p < 0.001) across all discipline-specific language skills following the Positive Psychology (PP) intervention. As shown in Table 2, vocabulary acquisition demonstrated the most substantial gain (Δ = +13.53%), followed by text comprehension (Δ = +14.12%) and presentation skills (Δ = +15.29%). This pattern aligns with Seligman et al.'s (2009) findings on PP interventions enhancing cognitive absorption, suggesting that joyful activities like strengths-based role-plays created optimal conditions for retaining technical terms, such as *mudharabah* and *takaful*. The vocabulary advantage may stem from PP activities' dual reinforcement mechanism: emotional encoding of lexical items during affectively positive tasks (Brown et al., 2019), coupled with repeated contextualized use in religiously resonant scenarios, such as debating *zakat* distribution models, which heightened neural encoding specificity (Kavaliauskienė, 2015).

Critically, correlation analysis established a strong positive relationship between joyful engagement (composite score) and language improvement (r = 0.72, p < 0.01). This robust linkage empirically validates Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory in the ESP context: Students experiencing higher joy demonstrated expanded cognitive bandwidth for language processing, reducing anxiety's inhibitory effects (Horwitz, 2001). Qualitative insights elucidate this mechanism—students frequently noted lowered affective filters during role-plays, such as "I forgot my fear of mispronouncing sukuk when debating enthusiastically", directly supporting Krashen's (1982) model. The findings extend Chang's (2021) anxiety-reduction research by demonstrating that joy actively scaffolds skill acquisition through motivational persistence, as observed in students voluntarily practicing complex presentations about waqf investments to "share excitement" (Journal, Student 5).

Collectively, these results affirm that joy functions not merely as a byproduct but as an active catalyst for discipline-specific language mastery. The significant skill enhancements—particularly vocabulary—paired with the strong joy-learning correlation (r = 0.72), provide empirical support for Dörnyei's (2009) assertion that affective engagement is foundational to L2 achievement. This study thus bridges Kavaliauskienė's (2015) relevance-focused ESP framework with Seligman's well-being science, demonstrating that strategically designed PP activities transform obligatory language learning into a conduit for both professional competence and holistic growth within Islamic higher education contexts.

Table 2: Pre-Post Language Performance (%, n=17)

Skill	Pre-Mean (SE	Post-Mean (SI	t-value	<i>p</i> -value
Islamic Economics Vocab	65.29 (12.34)	78.82 (9.87)	-4.21	< 0.001
Presentation Skills	60.59 (15.22)	75.88 (11.76)	-4.05	0.001

Text Comprehension	62.35 (13.45)	76.47 (10.93)	-4.57	< 0.001

Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of interviews and journals revealed four key themes:

- 1. Emotional Transformation: Students reported reduced anxiety and increased intrinsic motivation. Journal entries highlighted shifts from "dread" to "looking forward to class," particularly during strengths-based role-plays, such as simulating zakat distribution negotiations.
- 2. Disciplinary Relevance as Catalyst: Activities linking English to Islamic finance, such as gratitude reflections on ethical investments, enhanced perceived usefulness. One student noted: "Discussing Islamic microfinance in English felt purposeful—I wasn't just learning words, I was preparing for my mission" (Journal, Student 12).
- 3. Strengths-Based Confidence: Role-plays leveraging character strengths, such as "fairness" in profit-sharing debates, built confidence. A student shared: "Identifying my strength as 'critical thinking' helped me lead a discussion on sukuk bonds without fear" (Interview, Student 9).
- 4. Cultural-Religious Synergy: Students organically connected PP activities to Islamic values. Gratitude journals were described as "mirroring shukr (thankfulness to Allah)", while accomplishment celebrations evoked "shared barakah (blessing)" (Journal, Student 14).

Discussion

The integration of Positive Psychology (PP) activities into ESP instruction yielded significant improvements in both joyful engagement and discipline-specific language acquisition, addressing critical gaps in affective pedagogy for non-English majors in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

1. Joyful Engagement as a Foundation for Learning

Quantitative results confirmed that PP activities, such as strengths-based role-plays and gratitude reflections, significantly enhanced joyful engagement, aligning with Seligman et al.'s (2009) assertion that PP interventions bolster academic well-being. The surge in observed positive behaviors (Figure 1) and self-reported enjoyment (Table 1) supports Fredrickson's (2001) "broaden-and-build" theory: positive emotions expanded students' cognitive and social resources, facilitating increased participation and persistence. Crucially, qualitative data revealed that joy stemmed not from superficial "fun" but from meaningful task engagement. For instance, gratitude reflections on ethical economics resonated deeply with Islamic values, transforming obligatory language practice into an act of religious identity (*shukr*). This echoes Kavaliauskiene's (2015) findings on relevance reducing anxiety but extends them by demonstrating joy's role in sustaining effort—addressing Fauziah and Nur's (2022) call for affective frameworks in Indonesian contexts.

2. Mechanisms Linking Joy to Language Acquisition

The strong correlation (r = 0.72) between engagement gains and language improvement underscores joy's catalytic function in skill development. Qualitative insights clarify this link: students attributed vocabulary growth to reduced barriers during role-plays ("I forgot to be nervous debating mudharabah contracts"), supporting Krashen's (1982)Affective Filter Hypothesis. Further, discipline-specific such tasks. presenting on waqf investments, provided authentic language rehearsal, merging PP's emotional benefits with ESP's pragmatic aims. This dual impact validates Brown et al.'s (2019) "pedagogies of joy" model, which posits that joy enhances retention through emotional encoding-evident in students' ability to recall niche terms, such as takaful, more readily after the intervention (Table 2).

3. Cultural-Contextual Nuances in PP Implementation

A key contribution is this study's demonstration of PP's compatibility with Islamic educational values. Where Chang (2021) applied mindfulness to reduce anxiety in general EFL, this study embedded PP within disciplinary and religious frameworks unique to Sharia Economics. Students reframed gratitude journals as acts of *shukr* and viewed accomplishment celebrations as communal *barakah*, illustrating how Western-derived PP constructs can be localized through culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This synergy likely amplified engagement; as one student noted, "Using English to discuss Islamic finance felt like worship (ibadah)" (Interview, Student 7). Such findings answer the literature's neglect of contextual integration and offer a template for adapting PP to non-Western settings.

4. Limitations and Implications

While significant, findings must be interpreted cautiously due to the small, single-cohort sample (n=17). Nevertheless, the mixed-methods design provided triangulation, strengthening validity. The study confirms that joy-centered ESP pedagogies when grounded in disciplinary relevance and cultural values can transcend transactional language instruction. For educators, practical takeaways include: (1) Designing strengths-based tasks around authentic disciplinary scenarios, such as role-playing *halal* certification negotiations. (2) Incorporating reflective protocols that bridge language objectives and students' value systems. (3) Celebrating micro-achievements to build self-efficacy.

Future research should test this model in larger Indonesian ESP cohorts and explore longitudinal impacts on professional communication.

CONCLUSION

This study conclusively demonstrates that integrating Positive Psychology (PP) activities such as strengths-based role-plays, gratitude reflections, and accomplishment celebrations into ESP instruction for Sharia Economics students significantly enhances both joyful engagement and discipline-specific language acquisition. Quantitative results confirmed statistically significant improvements (p < 0.001) in affective engagement (+1.37-point increase in AEQ Enjoyment),

language skills (+13.53% in vocabulary mastery), with a strong correlation (r = 0.72) between joy and learning gains. Qualitatively, students reported reduced anxiety, heightened intrinsic motivation, and meaningful connections between PP activities and Islamic values, such as framing gratitude as *shukr*, transforming language learning from a transactional task into a purposeful, identity-affirming experience. Despite the small sample size (n = 17), the mixed-methods design robustly validates joy as an active catalyst for cognitive retention and contextual skill application, offering a replicable pedagogical framework that merges ESP pragmatism with holistic student flourishing in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

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