THE USE OF POSITIVE EMOTIVE LANGUAGE BY ENGLISH EDUCATORS: IMPACT ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract:

There's growing awareness that the way educators speak, their tone, word choices, and overall language, can shape how students respond in class. This study explores how English lecturers at a public university in Johor use Positive Emotive Language (PEL), and how that connects to student motivation and participation. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combined survey data from 20 English educators with follow-up interviews to dive deeper into their experiences. The survey asked how often they used positive or inclusive expressions, and which types they preferred. The interviews added color to the numbers where educators shared real-life examples, like giving a kind remark after a student's mistake or using gentle prompts to keep discussions going. The quantitative data, analyzed using Pearson correlation, revealed a clear link between the frequent use of affirming language and higher levels of student engagement. The interviews revealed the role of sincerity as many educators said it was not just what they said, but how and when they said it that mattered most. Some also shared the challenge of finding the right tone in culturally diverse classrooms, where interpretations of "supportive" language can vary. In the end, this study shows that thoughtful, well-timed, and genuine communication does not just help students feel seen and heard; it can directly influence how willing they are to participate and take academic risks.

Keywords:

Emotive Language, English Language, Learning Experience, Engagement

Introduction

Language is not just a tool for sharing information, it shapes how students feel, engage, and whether they truly feel part of the learning space. The words educators choose, the tone they use, and how they respond in the moment all contribute to the atmosphere of a classroom. In English language teaching especially, emotionally supportive language, phrases that carry warmth, encouragement, and care, can significantly increase students' confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate (Huang et al., 2024). Positive Emotive Language (PEL) is the intentional use of encouraging and emotionally uplifting language by educators during classroom interactions such as "Well done" or "You're improving". The main aim of using these phrases are to boost student morale and increase engagement.

The main idea behind PEL is that the educator's tone and word choices can significantly influence students' emotional responses and overall learning experiences. Research by Hejazi et al. (2023) demonstrates that educator support significantly reduces second language learners' anxiety, which in turn increases their willingness to communicate. This pattern suggests that the use of emotionally rich language, plays a vital role in lowering anxiety and bolstering motivation. This applies particularly to learners who may feel vulnerable in the language classroom. This study explored PEL not just by looking at it as a linguistic tool but as a psychological catalyst for learning. Examining how the consistent application of PEL influences students' emotional engagement and active participation in English language learning helps validate its use.

Problem Statement

With growing focus on student-centered learning, there is a pressing need to look more closely at how educators' language influences student engagement. While broader research on educator talk exists, there is still limited insight into the intentional use of supportive language in English language classrooms, especially those with culturally diverse learners. Recent reviews of classroom interaction emphasize this gap, particularly in university settings, and call for more practical and contextualized studies (Zou et al., 2024). This study takes on that gap by exploring how English educators use positive, emotive language, what kinds of expressions they choose, how often, in what contexts, and how students respond.

Recent studies support this direction, for instance, emotionally supportive educator-student communication has been shown to enhance classroom climate and help learners feel safer, more motivated, and more likely to engage (Liu & Zhou, 2024). Moreover, supportive verbal behaviors by educators have been found to boost learner resilience, focus, and overall classroom enjoyment, especially in language learning contexts (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024). By narrowing in on English language instruction, this study contributes new and practical knowledge on how emotionally supportive language can build more inclusive, engaging, and empowering classrooms. Thus, this study aims to examine how English language educators in Malaysian universities use positive emotive language to enhance student engagement, motivation, and classroom participation.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:
(1) To identify the types and patterns of positive emotive language used by lecturers.
(2) To explore lecturers' perceptions of the effectiveness of positive emotive language in enhancing student learning experiences.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer two research questions:
(1) What are the types and patterns of positive emotive language used by English educators?
(2) What are the educators' perceptions on the effectiveness of positive emotive language in enhancing student learning experiences?

Literature Review

Positive emotive language has gained increasing attention in educational research for its influence on how students participate, stay motivated, and respond to their overall learning experience. Studies continue to show that the way educators speak, especially when they express encouragement, warmth, and support, can shift the tone of a classroom and make students feel more at ease and willing to contribute in learning. In the context of English language instruction, this form of communication plays a central role in shaping how students perceive both their educators and the learning tasks in front of them. This review focuses on related theory such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) identifying the main forms of positive emotive language used by English educators, looking at how often and in what ways it appears, and analyzing how such language may affect classroom involvement and student progress.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) In Language Education

SDT has become increasingly influential in understanding motivation within language learning contexts. The theory posits that students are more likely to engage in learning when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported (Deci & Ryan, 2020). These needs are particularly relevant in second language classrooms, where learners often face emotional and cognitive challenges.

Recent studies have demonstrated that the language used by educators can significantly impact these psychological needs. For instance, Wang (2025) found that affective feedback, language that conveys support and encouragement, directly enhances learners' emotional engagement and self-efficacy in online English learning environments. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2024) showed that autonomy-supportive communication in feedback helps students develop stronger self-regulated learning behaviors and greater confidence in their linguistic competence.

Moreover, research by Jia and Cheng (2024) emphasized that emotionally responsive teaching, especially in multicultural or large classes, plays a vital role in reducing learner anxiety and increasing participation by satisfying the need for relatedness. Inclusive language and personalized affirmations were associated with higher levels of classroom engagement and a stronger sense of belonging.

The motivational benefits of PEL are also supported by studies in applied linguistics. Handa et al. (2023) explored the use of growth mindset-supportive language (GMSL) and found that it improved students' challenge-seeking behavior and reduced performance disparities in second-language classrooms. These findings reflect the importance of competence-affirming feedback in encouraging students to persist despite linguistic difficulties.

Taken together, these studies confirm the relevance of SDT as a foundation for examining the impact of positive emotive language. In this research, SDT provides a clear path of understanding through which the emotional and motivational dimensions of English Second

Language (ESL) teaching are interpreted, linking educator communication styles to learner outcomes.

Types Of Positive Emotive Language (PEL) Used By Educators

While much research highlights the importance of positive emotive language in boosting student engagement, understanding the specific forms this language takes, such as words of encouragement, expressions of appreciation, and inclusive language is essential, especially in diverse classrooms. This knowledge allows educators to use these language types more intentionally, enhancing student motivation and academic achievement.

Words of encouragement serve as powerful tools for building students' confidence and internal motivation. Research by Gong et al., (2022) and Cai and Wu (2025) shows that frequent, sincere encouragement helps students persist through academic challenges. Phrases like "You can do it" or "I believe in your abilities" support a positive learning environment where students feel more comfortable taking risks and expressing themselves. However, Brummelman, Crocker, and Bushman (2016) warn that overusing encouragement can backfire if it appears insincere, so educators must strike a balance between consistency and authenticity.

Expressions of appreciation, such as "Thank you for your contributions" or "I appreciate your efforts," strengthen relational bonds and affirm students' value within the learning community. Public gratitude toward educators, especially for their motivational and compassionate qualities has been shown to reinforce teacher recognition and nurture positive emotional climates (Allen et al., 2024).

Supportive language is another key form. Huang et al. (2024) highlight the value of statements like "I'm here if you need help" or "Don't hesitate to ask," which reassure students and create a safe space for participation. This is particularly important in large or impersonal classes, where students may feel overlooked or intimidated. Educators who convey support help ease anxiety and boost students' confidence, reducing feelings of isolation and encouraging greater involvement (Jia & Cheng, 2024).

Inclusive language is phrases that affirm every student's contribution plays an important role in reducing marginalization and fostering collaboration in diverse classrooms. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective, relatedness which is feeling connected and accepted, is a fundamental psychological need that enhances students' intrinsic motivation and enjoyment (Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, a strong sense of belonging, characterized by inclusion and support has been consistently found to improve academic engagement, performance, and psychological well-being, while decreasing risks like anxiety and dropout (Lee & Huang, 2021).

Finally, motivational language encourages perseverance and a growth mindset. Empirical evidence supports the impact of such language choices in educational contexts. A study on Growth Mindset Supportive Language (GMSL) by Handa, Clapper, Boyle, Wang, Yang, Yeager, and Demszky (2023) shows that reframing neutral or discouraging remarks into growth-oriented sentiments significantly reduces achievement disparities and stimulates challenge-seeking behaviors among students. Goller and Späth (2023) emphasize that phrases like "Good job!" and do more than lift spirits. They shape how students approach challenges and when educators use motivational language strategically, they help students see effort as the

path to success and view mistakes as opportunities to learn. However, generic phrases may fall flat if they do not acknowledge the specific difficulties students face and language learners tend to benefit more from direct error-focused feedback such as feedback on grammar, organizing, and their ideas (Ganapathy et al., 2020).

Patterns Of Positive Emotive Language (PEL) Used In English Classrooms
The frequency and context in which lecturers use positive emotive language significantly affect student engagement. Positive feedback, especially when used deliberately and responsively, helps foster a classroom environment where students feel emotionally supported and motivated. In a recent mixed-methods study grounded in Self-Determination Theory, affective feedback, characterized by emotionally supportive comments was found to improve learners' emotional engagement and self-efficacy in online learning environments (Wang, 2025). These findings emphasize that consistent, well-placed positive language plays a crucial role in reinforcing learner confidence.

However, effectiveness depends on thoughtful use. Research shows that overuse or overly generic praise may lead students to question its sincerity. A study by Câmpean et al. (2024) involving primary and secondary teachers in Romania highlighted that while positive feedback is essential, it must be authentic and specific to be meaningful. When educators fail to tailor their language to individual students or contexts, the impact of positive communication diminishes.

The learning context also shapes the optimal usage of emotive language. In small class settings, personalized praise or encouragement can significantly reduce student anxiety and increase engagement. Wang and Marecki (2021) found that in EFL classrooms, students who experienced educator encouragement immediately after responding, even when incorrect, felt less anxious and more willing to participate. Conversely, in large lectures, educators may rely more on general inclusive language to create a sense of community and belonging, as individual attention is harder to achieve.

Additionally, the role of autonomy-supportive communication in feedback has been highlighted in a study by Zhang et al. (2024), which demonstrated that such language enhances feedback literacy and intrinsic motivation. By meeting students' psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—positive emotive language facilitates not only engagement but also deeper learning habits. Ultimately, the most effective educators are those who adjust their emotional language based on real-time student responses and class dynamics. Whether through a warm tone, validating feedback, or personal encouragement, lecturers who remain sensitive to classroom atmosphere can better support sustained academic participation.

Effectiveness of Positive Emotive Language in Promoting Student Engagement and Enhancing the Learning Experience
There is substantial empirical evidence supporting the positive impact of emotive language on student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. A meta-analysis of 13 studies by Cen and Zheng 2023) concluded that multi-source feedback, including educator comments, had a significant positive effect on motivation in second-language writing classrooms. Commentary feedback, particularly when emphasizing students' potential and effort, was more effective than corrective-only feedback.

Positive educator–student interactions, especially those conveying emotional warmth and encouragement, are strongly linked to student well-being. Zheng (2022) found that emotionally supportive instructor behaviors foster a sense of belonging and reduce emotional fatigue, ultimately enhancing cognitive and behavioral engagement. These interpersonal dynamics are especially crucial in higher education, where students face heightened academic and psychological pressures. Moreover, feedback that is both timely and emotionally resonant can reinforce self-regulated learning behaviors.

Furthermore, educator feedback practices have been linked to student satisfaction and academic success. Gan et al. (2021) used structural equation modeling to show that students' perceptions of feedback quality directly impacted course satisfaction and indirectly improved academic performance through heightened motivation and feedback behavior. Together, these findings indicate that positive emotive language, when used authentically and contextually, is not merely a nicety, but a pedagogical tool with measurable impacts. It fosters emotional security, strengthens student–educator relationships, and supports a learning environment where students feel seen, valued, and empowered to succeed.

Methodology

This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to get a clear picture of how English educators use positive emotive language and what are their perceptions about it. Questionnaire adapted from Fredrickson (2001) is used to obtained quantitative data and interviews gave a chance to hear what educators think and feel about their language choices related to PEL.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), which explains human motivation in terms of three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
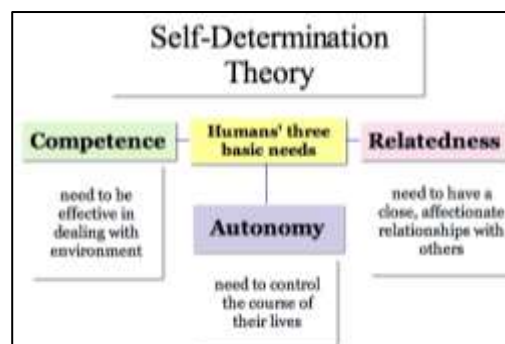

Figure 1: Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

In the context of this study, positive emotive language (PEL) used by English language educators functions as a motivational tool that supports the core psychological needs outlined in Self-Determination Theory. First, PEL fosters autonomy by empowering students to take initiative and feel a sense of ownership over their learning through supportive and encouraging language. Second, it enhances competence by reinforcing students' belief in their abilities and progress; for instance, phrases such as "You're improving" or "That's a thoughtful answer" affirm their efforts and achievements. Finally, PEL promotes relatedness by using expressions of appreciation, inclusive language, and emotional warmth, which help students feel valued,

supported, and connected within the classroom environment. By framing the study within SDT, the study investigates how educators' use of positive language may fulfill these psychological needs, thus enhancing learner participation, motivation, and engagement.

Participants

The study involved twenty English lecturers from a Johor-based university. This group was intentionally selected as it aligned with the aims of the research, which focused on the role of classroom language strategies in supporting second language learners. As emphasized by Ingham-Broomfield (2014), a research population refers to a defined set of individuals who share characteristics relevant to the study. In this case, the participants were educators with exposure to emotion-oriented teaching practices in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Every lecturer agreed to participate by answering a questionnaire and contributing to an interview session. The sample represented a balance of newer and more experienced lecturers, ensuring that diverse insights into the practice of positive language in teaching were captured.

Data Collection

For the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire adapted from Fredrickson's (2011) work on positive emotions. It focused on how often English educators use affirming or supportive phrases such as encouragement, praise, or expressions of appreciation. It was designed to assess the frequency, types, and specific expressions of positive emotive language used by the educators in their classrooms. The questionnaire included a series of Likert-scale items, ranging from "never" to "always," to measure how frequently lecturers employed positive language in their interactions with students. The questionnaire also contained questions on perceived effectiveness of such language in fostering student engagement and enhancing the overall learning experience. The data collected from the questionnaire provided an overview of the lecturers' practices and established patterns of positive emotive language usage.

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with all 20 participants. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, and was conducted individually to explore the educators' perceptions and experiences with positive emotive language. The interviews were designed to probe areas such as lecturers' motivations for using positive language, its perceived impact on student engagement and learning outcomes, and any challenges faced when integrating positive emotive language into their teaching practices. The semi-structured interview format provided flexibility, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and offer insights into the role of emotive language in shaping classroom dynamics. Interview questions were designed to encourage reflection on key themes such as emotional tone, inclusivity, and student feedback.

Data Analysis

The data were examined through a dual approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Numerical data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics to identify the frequency of positive language use and the types most commonly employed by educators. This not only provided an overview of general patterns but also highlighted whether variables such as teaching experience or class type influenced language practices. To further assess whether greater use of positive language correlated with enhanced student engagement or improved attitudes toward learning, a correlation analysis was conducted.

For the qualitative component, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was applied. Interview responses were transcribed in full and systematically coded to identify recurring themes. This stage of the analysis shed light on lecturers' perceptions of the effectiveness of positive language and its practical application in daily classroom interactions. The qualitative findings complemented the numerical results by providing richer insights that quantitative measures alone could not capture.

Results

Analysis of responses from 20 lecturers provided valuable insights into the role of positive language in classroom interactions. Quantitative findings indicated the frequency with which encouraging expressions were used and identified the types most commonly favored. Complementing these results, the qualitative data enriched the analysis by capturing educators' reflections on moments when their choice of language influenced student engagement or when determining an appropriate tone proved challenging.

Types of Positive Emotive Language Used by English Educators

To measure how often lecturers used positive emotive language, numbers were given to different frequency ranges. This made it easier to analyze the data clearly and consistently. The scoring system for each type of positive language is shown below.

Table 1: Quantitative Data Scoring System

Frequency Option	Score	Explanation
Never	1	This would indicate a complete absence of the specific language in their teaching style.
Rarely (1-2 times per lesson)	2	This suggests limited use, but the language is still occasionally included in their lessons.
Sometimes (3-4 times per lesson)	3	This represents moderate usage and indicates a regular presence of positive emotive language in their teaching.
Often (5-6 times per lesson)	4	This reflects a frequent application, demonstrating a strong commitment to using positive emotive language.
Always (7 or more times per lesson)	5	This indicates constant and sustained use of the language throughout the lesson.

The data was then scored and analyzed. The table below summarizes the mean frequency of each type of positive emotive language.

Table 2: Quantitative Data Scoring System

Type of Positive Emotive Language	Mean Frequency per Lesson	Percentage of Lecturers Using this Type
Words of Encouragement	3.5 times	85%
Motivational Phrases	3 times	65%
Expressions of Appreciation	2.5 times	75%
Providing Support	2-3 times	70%
Inclusive Language	1-2 times	60%

The table shows that Words of Encouragement were the most commonly used type of positive emotive language, with an average of 3.5 times per lesson. About 85% of the lecturers reported using these phrases regularly. Expressions like "Well done," "Keep up the great work," and "You're doing an excellent job" came up in almost every interview. Educators said these words helped create a positive vibe and gave students a confidence boost, especially when lessons got tough. One participant said, "I use encouragement to keep students motivated, even when things get difficult."

Motivational Phrases were also quite common, with 65% of educators using them around three times per lesson. These phrases encouraged students to keep going and believe in themselves. Examples include "You can do this," "Keep going, you're on the right track," and "It's okay to make mistakes, that's how you learn." Many educators mentioned how these phrases helped build a growth mindset and made the classroom feel like a safe place to face challenges.

Expressions of Appreciation and Providing Support appeared slightly less often, between two and three times per lesson. About 75% of educators used appreciation phrases such as "I appreciate your effort" or "Thank you for your participation." These made students feel noticed and valued. One educator explained, "When I show appreciation, students realize their input matters, so they stay more involved." Providing Support was highlighted too, with phrases like "Don't worry if you don't get it now, we can revisit it," or "Feel free to ask me anything if you're unsure." This kind of language helped ease anxiety and made students feel comfortable asking for help.

Inclusive Language was the least used, appearing one to two times per lesson and used by 60% of educators. Examples included "Everyone has something valuable to contribute," "Let's work together as a class," and "Your ideas are important." These phrases aimed to make sure everyone felt respected and part of the group. However, educators sometimes did not realize how important inclusive language was unless students gave feedback or they had specific training about cultural sensitivity. So, while it's valued, it was not as often used as the other types of positive emotive language.

Usage Patterns of Positive Emotive Language
The frequency and context of positive emotive language use varied among the educators. Most reported consistently using positive language throughout their lessons, though the frequency of specific types differed. Words of Encouragement and Motivational Phrases were the most common, often given immediately in response to student effort or achievement. On the other hand, Expressions of Appreciation and Providing Support were used more selectively, usually when students faced particular challenges or difficulties.

Around 80% of educators said they used positive emotive language at the start of their lessons to create a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere. Common phrases included "Let's get started" and "I'm looking forward to your participation today." Positive language was also frequently employed when students struggled with the material. Nearly 85% of educators shared that they used supportive expressions in these moments to help ease student anxiety and maintain motivation.

Furthermore, the majority of lecturers (90%) believed positive emotive language boosted student engagement and participation. In the questionnaire, 88% rated the use of positive language as either "very effective" or "effective" for creating a positive classroom environment and enhancing student confidence. One educator explained, "I've noticed that when I use encouragement, students seem more motivated and willing to contribute." Another added, "Positive feedback helps build rapport with students, making them feel more comfortable in class."

Statistical Data Results

To get a clearer picture of how English lecturers vary in their use of positive emotive language, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied. Descriptive statistics such as mean frequency, median, and standard deviation helped summarize how often each of the five types of positive emotive language appeared in the classroom.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis For The Type of PEL Used

Type of PEL	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Percentage of Educators Uses
Words of Encouragement	3.5 times	4	4	0.9	85%
Motivational Phrases	3 times	3	3	1.0	65%
Expressions of Appreciation	2.5 times	3	3	0.8	75%
Supportive Language	2-3 times	2.5	3	0.7	70%
Inclusive Language	1-2 times	2	2	1.2	60%

From the table, it is clearr to see that Words of Encouragement were the most frequently used form of positive emotive language (M = 3.5, SD = 0.9), showing relatively consistent application across educators. Motivational Phrases followed (M = 3.0, SD = 1.0), though with greater variation in frequency. Expressions of Appreciation and Supportive Language were used moderately (M = 2.5, SD = 0.8; M = 2.5, SD = 0.7, respectively), while Inclusive Language was the least frequent and most inconsistent (M = 1.5, SD = 1.2). Overall, the findings suggest that while encouragement and motivation are regularly integrated into classroom communication, more relational strategies such as appreciation, support, and especially the use of inclusive language are less systematically applied.

ANOVA Test Results

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in the frequency of positive emotive language (PEL) use across the five identified categories (Words of Encouragement, Motivational Phrases, Expressions of Appreciation, Supportive Language, and Inclusive Language).

Table 4: ANOVA Test Result

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	349.6	4	87.40	166.73	<.001
Within Groups	49.8	95	0.52		
Total	399.4	99			

Based on the table above, the results revealed a statistically significant difference among the groups, $F(4, 95) = 166.73$, $p < .001$. This indicates that the type of PEL used by educators varied significantly in frequency. These findings are consistent with broader evidence supporting the impact of positive teacher feedback on student motivation and engagement (Câmpean et al., 2024).

Effectiveness of Positive Emotive Language in Promoting Student Engagement

The effectiveness of positive emotive language in promoting student engagement was evident in the responses from educators. They reported that students who received regular positive feedback showed increased participation in class activities and were more likely to contribute their ideas. As one educator remarked, "When I use encouraging words and acknowledge their efforts, students seem more eager to speak up and engage with the material." The frequency and context of positive emotive language use varied among the educators. Most reported consistently using positive language throughout their lessons, though the frequency of specific types differed.

Positive Emotive Language and Students' Engagement and Enhancement in Learning

To assess the effectiveness of positive emotive language in promoting student engagement and enhancing the learning experience, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to explore the relationship between the frequency of positive emotive language usage and student engagement scores, as well as the perceived enhancement in learning experience reported by the educators. The effectiveness was measured based on how the usage of these language types correlated with students' participation, attentiveness, and overall classroom interaction.

Table 5: Pearson-Correlation Test Result

Type of Positive Emotive Language	Engagement (r)	Learning Enhancement (r)
Words of Encouragement	0.72	0.69
Motivational Phrases	0.68	0.63
Expressions of Appreciation	0.65	0.61
Supportive Language	0.60	0.58
Inclusive Language	0.45	0.50

The correlation analysis shows that all five types of positive emotive language are positively linked to student engagement and learning enhancement. Among them, Words of Encouragement have the strongest associations with both engagement (r = 0.72) and learning enhancement (r = 0.69). This suggests that when educators frequently encourage students, learners are more engaged and achieve better outcomes.

Motivational Phrases and Expressions of Appreciation also show strong positive correlations (r = 0.68 and r = 0.65 for engagement, respectively), indicating that they play a meaningful role in boosting student participation and the overall learning experience. Supportive Language shows moderate correlations (r = 0.60 for engagement; r = 0.58 for learning), highlighting its contribution to creating a supportive classroom environment.

By contrast, Inclusive Language shows the weakest correlations with engagement (r = 0.45) and learning enhancement (r = 0.50). While still positive, its impact appears less direct compared to the other types of language. This suggests that while inclusivity is essential for a welcoming environment, its influence on immediate engagement and learning outcomes is less pronounced.

Overall, the findings confirm that positive emotive language enhances both engagement and learning. Words of Encouragement, Motivational Phrases, and Expressions of Appreciation appear especially influential, whereas Inclusive Language, though still valuable, shows a weaker effect. These results highlight the important role of educator language in shaping classroom experiences and learning success.

Thematic Analysis Of Qualitative Data
The qualitative data collected from interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. To support systematic coding, theme development, and data management, MAXQDA software was employed.

Table 6: Thematic Analysis on Interviews

Theme	Description	Example from Educators' Responses
Frequency and Types of Positive Emotive Language	This theme explores the different forms of positive language (e.g., praise, encouragement) used by lecturers, and how frequently they are employed in the classroom.	"I often use encouraging words like 'Well done' or 'Great job' to boost students' confidence, especially when they contribute in discussions. I'd say about 3-4 times per lesson."

Perceived Impact on Student Engagement	This theme focuses on lecturers' perceptions of how positive language affects student engagement, motivation, and participation.	"When I praise students for their effort, I see more students raising their hands and contributing to the class. It's like they feel more confident to speak up."
Challenges and Barriers to Using Positive Emotive Language	This theme addresses the barriers lecturers face in consistently using positive language, such as large class sizes and time constraints.	"In larger classes, I find it difficult to give personal praise to each student, and time constraints make it hard to always use positive language, especially for individual needs."
Cultural and Contextual Influences on Language Use	This theme explores how cultural factors and the diversity of student backgrounds influence the use of positive language in the classroom.	"In a multicultural classroom, some respond well to praise, while others prefer a more formal approach."

Educators reported using different forms of positive emotive language in their classes, such as praise ("Well done," "Great job"), encouragement, and empathy. These expressions were used frequently to motivate students and increase participation, showing the importance of consistent reinforcement in learning. They also noted that positive language directly influenced student engagement. Many explained that praise and encouragement boosted students' confidence and led to more active participation in discussions.

However, challenges made it difficult to use positive language consistently. Large class sizes, limited time, and varying student needs were common barriers. For instance, some lecturers said it was hard to give personal praise to every student in bigger classes. Cultural diversity also shaped how positive language was used. In a multicultural classroom, lecturers adjusted their style to fit students' backgrounds. While some students appreciated direct praise, others preferred a more subtle or formal approach.

Overall, the analysis showed that lecturers use a wide range of positive language strategies to support learning, encourage participation, and manage behavior. Despite the barriers, positive emotive language remains a valuable tool for building motivation, engagement, and a positive classroom atmosphere.

Discussion
This study's findings shed light on how positive emotive language (PEL) meaningfully contributes to student engagement, confidence, and a more harmonious classroom atmosphere. The educators' use of encouraging and affirming expressions was not only frequent but also appeared to make students feel more comfortable participating. These results reflect trends noted in earlier research, which highlights the powerful influence of educator language on student motivation and classroom dynamics (Gong et al., 2022; Cai & Wu, 2025; Handa et al., 2023).

One of the recurring patterns in the data was educators' regular use of phrases like "Well done" or "Great job." These forms of praise helped to create a positive learning environment and were closely tied to increased student participation. Such findings support claims made by Goller and Späth (2023), who suggest that motivational feedback not only encourages effort but also helps students view challenges more optimistically. Similarly, Gong et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of genuine encouragement in helping learners persist, particularly when facing academic difficulties.

The connection between PEL and student participation became even more evident when educators noted how students became more responsive after receiving verbal praise or supportive feedback. This aligns with observations in the literature that show how teacher encouragement often sparks active involvement from learners (Zheng, 2022; Wang & Marecki, 2021). The present study adds new insights to this understanding by offering concrete examples from the Malaysian English Second Language (ESL) setting, illustrating how such feedback works in real classroom interactions (Wang, 2025).

At the same time, the study highlighted certain challenges faced by lecturers when trying to use PEL consistently, especially in larger or more diverse classes. These findings highlight previous concerns in the literature about how institutional limitations and classroom size can restrict the ability to provide personalized feedback (Câmpean et al., 2024; Ganapathy et al., 2020). Despite their best intentions, educators often struggle to maintain authenticity and relevance in their language use when time and resources are limited. This issue is also raised by Jia and Cheng (2024) and Zhang et al. (2024), who both noted that autonomy-supportive communication becomes more difficult to implement effectively under such constraints.

Cultural and contextual elements also played a role in shaping how PEL was applied. Educators shared that student responses to praise varied depending on individual and cultural preferences, with some students responding well to direct encouragement and others preferring subtler forms of affirmation. This reflects Lee and Huang's (2021) findings on the cultural variability of student preferences for feedback and relates closely to the SDT principle of relatedness, the need to feel understood and supported (Wang et al., 2019).

While the benefits of PEL are well-established, this study contributes to the psycho-linguistic field by focusing on how Malaysian ESL educators apply such strategies within their unique teaching contexts. The evidence supports the broader view that PEL is not just a method of encouragement but it is a pedagogical tool that can shape classroom experiences and influence learner outcomes in meaningful ways (Gan et al., 2021; Cen & Zheng, 2023).

Conclusion

This research underscores the important role that positive emotive language plays in promoting student engagement, motivation, and participation in Malaysian university ESL classrooms. Drawing from both classroom observations and educator reflections, the study demonstrates how supportive, appreciative, and motivational language helps build more responsive and emotionally safe learning environments. These findings are consistent with the principles of Self-Determination Theory, reinforcing the idea that emotionally supportive communication helps students feel connected, reduces anxiety, and boosts their sense of competence.

What sets this study apart is its emphasis on practical, context-specific insights. By focusing on how Malaysian ESL lecturers navigate both cultural and institutional challenges when using PEL, the research provides fresh contributions to the wider body of knowledge. The novelty lies in how lecturer perspectives were integrated with established motivational theories to illustrate the real-world impact of positive language on student behavior. This localized perspective enriches the global conversation around inclusive and responsive pedagogy.

In terms of practical application, the study points to the value of incorporating positive communication strategies into educator training and professional development. Given the diverse and often large class sizes common in higher education, equipping lecturers with tools for using authentic and effective PEL could improve not only student engagement but also the broader emotional climate of classrooms.

Looking ahead, future research could explore how sustained use of PEL affects students over time, particularly in terms of academic performance and mental well-being. Comparative studies across cultural or disciplinary contexts could also provide deeper insight into how different forms of PEL function across educational environments. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine the effects of specific PEL types—such as motivational language versus inclusive or growth-oriented feedback—to fine-tune teaching approaches.

In closing, this study reaffirms that positive emotive language is more than just good practice—it is a strategic, evidence-based approach to teaching that supports student success. As universities continue to prioritize student-centered learning, emotionally intelligent and supportive communication should be recognized as essential to effective teaching in any classroom.

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