

Teachers' Experiences in Building Motivating and Anxiety-Reducing Language Learning

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Abstract

This study explores Indonesian language teachers' experiences in creating learning environments that foster students' self-confidence, enhance motivation, and reduce anxiety. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, twenty teachers from different educational levels were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. Findings indicate that teachers build self-confidence through scaffolding, gradual challenges, positive reinforcement, supportive feedback, growth mindset cultivation, and mentoring. Motivation is enhanced through contextual learning, project-based activities, gamification, authentic tasks, digital contextualization, and future-oriented relevance. Anxiety is reduced through safe classroom cultures, empathetic teacher–student relationships, nonjudgmental feedback, psychological safety, and humanistic assessment practices. The study demonstrates that motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are relationally shaped through pedagogical practices and classroom interactions. These findings highlight Indonesian language learning as not only a linguistic process but also an emotionally supportive educational experience that promotes student well-being and engagement.

Introduction

Language learning involves not only linguistic competence but also affective factors that significantly influence learning success. Academic self-efficacy plays an important role in mediating the relationship between engagement and anxiety while contributing to academic achievement (Rock & Danaee, 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). Students with higher motivation and confidence tend to participate more actively and take greater communicative risks, thereby enhancing language development. Previous studies have shown that motivation and self-efficacy positively influence engagement and achievement, whereas anxiety negatively affects performance (Teimouri et al., 2019; C. Li & Wei, 2023). However, language anxiety remains a persistent challenge, often triggered by fear of negative evaluation, performance pressure, and unsupportive learning experiences (Baran-Lucarz, 2022; Dewaele & Li, 2021).

Furthermore, research within the framework of positive psychology in language learning emphasizes that positive emotions, such as confidence and learning comfort. Positive emotions play an important role in mitigating the negative impact of anxiety (Resnik et al., 2025). Thus, effective language learning needs to integrate the reinforcement of cognitive and affective aspects in a balanced manner.

Most studies highlight the link between anxiety and motivation (Alghameeti et al., 2025), the relationship between motivation, anxiety, and willingness to communicate (Zhang et al., 2026), as well as the effect of self-efficacy on learning engagement and academic achievement (Yang et al., 2026). In addition, several studies have also begun to link the development of AI and Gen-AI technology to motivation, confidence, and language learning anxiety (Choi, 2025; Shao, 2025); Sun et al., 2026; L. Wang & Wang, 2025). Other research emphasizes the importance of the teacher-student relationship in influencing language learning anxiety and engagement (An et al., 2024; M. Li, 2026).

Most previous studies have employed mediation, moderation, or psychological network analysis to examine relationships among motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and engagement (Shang & Ma, 2024; Gan & Guo, 2026; Halim & Wu, 2025; Wei et al., 2026). However, teachers are often treated merely as contextual variables rather than as subjects whose pedagogical experiences are explored in depth. This limitation overlooks the important role of emotional and relational practices in shaping students' willingness to communicate and participate. Furthermore, existing research largely focuses on EFL, CFL, and Arabic language contexts, while Indonesian language learning remains underexplored, particularly regarding how teachers foster motivation, confidence, and reduced anxiety in everyday classroom practice.

In addition, research on motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-efficacy in language learning was mostly developed intensively in the context of foreign language learning. The context of Indonesian as the national language also presents unique teaching challenges because students learn the rules and usage of Indonesian as a formal language. This differs from the language students use in their daily lives. Therefore, teaching Indonesian also presents a challenge for teachers to motivate students to engage in the learning process. The teachers not only teach the linguistic competence of the first language, but also build a safe, supportive, and humanistic learning climate.

Therefore, research on the experience of teachers in building learning that motivates, increases confidence, and reduces students' anxiety has a strong research gap because it offers a phenomenological perspective that has rarely been touched in previous studies. Teacher experience is essential in guiding students to adopt deep learning strategies, which are associated with higher academic achievement (Saqr et al., 2023). Teachers' experiences can influence their understanding and implementation of these strategies (Granström et al., 2023).

Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore the experience of Indonesian teachers in building learning that is able to motivate students, increase confidence, and reduce learning anxiety. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this research offers novelty in the form of an in-depth exploration of the practices and meanings constructed by teachers in managing the affective aspects of language learning in the local Indonesian context. The findings of this study are expected not only to enrich the theoretical treasure in the study of language learning based on affective aspects, but also provide practical implications for the development of learning strategies that are more humanistic, reflective, and oriented towards the psychological well-being of students.

Literature review

Among these affective factors, motivation has consistently been identified as one of the most powerful determinants of language learning achievement. Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System provides a comprehensive explanation of how language learning motivation is rooted in learners' future-oriented self-concepts. The theory consists of three interconnected dimensions: the Ideal L2 Self, which reflects learners' desired future identity as successful language users; the Ought-to L2 Self, which represents

external expectations and obligations; and the L2 Learning Experience, which encompasses learners' actual classroom experiences. Recent studies have further confirmed the importance of future self-vision in shaping students' learning orientation, persistence, and language achievement (Huhtala et al., 2019; J. Huang et al., 2025). Nevertheless, motivation is increasingly understood as a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon rather than a stable personal characteristic. Research indicates that classroom interactions, peer relationships, instructional practices, and the overall learning environment significantly influence students' motivational trajectories (Bambirra, 2017; Bong, 2023; Knickenberg & Zurbriggen, 2025). Consequently, motivation should not be viewed solely as an internal attribute of learners but also as a product of pedagogical and social conditions created within the classroom. This perspective challenges approaches that place excessive responsibility on learners while overlooking the crucial role of teachers in fostering motivational learning environments.

Closely related to motivation is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to learners' beliefs about their capability to perform specific tasks successfully. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is not merely a reflection of actual competence but rather an individual's subjective judgment regarding their ability to accomplish desired outcomes. These beliefs influence learners' choices, effort expenditure, persistence when facing difficulties, and reactions to failure. In language learning contexts, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in communication, take linguistic risks, and persist despite challenges, whereas those with low self-efficacy tend to avoid demanding tasks and experience greater fear of failure. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated strong positive relationships between self-efficacy and language communication performance, willingness to communicate, and overall language achievement (Oktaria, 2023; Arzillayevna, 2024; Jonatan et al., 2025). Despite these findings, much of the existing literature continues to conceptualize self-efficacy as an individual-level variable that remains relatively stable across contexts. Such an approach often neglects the ways in which classroom interactions, teacher feedback, scaffolding practices, and interpersonal relationships contribute to the development of students' confidence. Therefore, there is a growing need for more contextualized investigations that examine how self-efficacy is socially constructed and continuously negotiated through pedagogical interactions.

Another critical affective factor in language learning is anxiety. Language anxiety has long been recognized as one of the most significant barriers to successful language acquisition. Horwitz (2001) conceptualized language anxiety through three primary dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These dimensions collectively influence learners' emotional experiences and often interfere with cognitive processing, participation, and language performance. Students who experience high levels of anxiety frequently encounter difficulties concentrating, expressing themselves, and engaging in classroom activities. Numerous contemporary studies have confirmed the detrimental effects of language anxiety on language achievement, communication competence, and overall learning outcomes (Bakri & Tannenbaum, 2025; J. Li et al., 2025; J. Wang et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025). However, recent developments in positive psychology have challenged deficit-oriented perspectives that focus exclusively on reducing anxiety. Instead, scholars argue that language learning environments should simultaneously reduce negative emotions and cultivate positive emotional

experiences. Research suggests that positive emotions such as enjoyment, confidence, hope, and psychological safety can buffer the negative effects of anxiety and contribute to more productive learning experiences (Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2016). Similar findings have been reported across educational and psychological contexts, demonstrating that the management of anxiety combined with the cultivation of positive emotions can improve well-being, performance, and long-term learning outcomes (LaFreniere & Newman, 2023; Niemann et al., 2023; Perdomo-Guevara & Dibben, 2025; Borchert et al., 2025).

Within this evolving understanding of affective learning, the role of teachers has become increasingly prominent. Rather than being viewed merely as transmitters of knowledge, teachers are now recognized as emotional architects who actively shape classroom climates through their pedagogical decisions, interpersonal interactions, and professional dispositions (Valente et al., 2022). Research has demonstrated that teachers' emotional intelligence, empathy, social competence, and communication skills significantly influence students' emotional experiences and perceptions of learning environments (García-Fernández & Saleh, 2023). Positive teacher–student relationships have been found to enhance students' motivation, strengthen self-confidence, and reduce learning-related anxiety (Nazish et al., 2024; Abid, 2025; Salter et al., 2025). Furthermore, studies on teacher cognition suggest that teachers' beliefs, values, and prior experiences influence how they design learning activities and respond to students' emotional needs. Research indicates that teachers' beliefs about competence, learner support, and educational values significantly shape their affective teaching practices both in face-to-face and online learning contexts (Flint et al., 2024; Ghalibafan & Jabbarpoor, 2025; Cheng et al., 2026). These findings imply that effective strategies for fostering motivation, confidence, and emotional well-being are not universal but are deeply contextual and shaped by teachers' interpretations of their teaching environments.

Despite the growing body of literature on affective dimensions in language learning, several important gaps remain. First, the dominance of quantitative approaches has generated substantial evidence regarding the relationships among motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, and learning outcomes, yet it provides limited understanding of how these constructs are experienced and negotiated in everyday classroom practices. Second, although teachers are increasingly recognized as central agents in shaping students' affective experiences, relatively few studies have explored these issues from the perspective of teachers' own lived experiences. Third, most existing research has been conducted in foreign language settings, particularly English language education, leaving local language learning contexts comparatively underexplored. In particular, the context of Indonesian language learning, with its unique sociocultural and educational characteristics, remains largely absent from international discussions.

Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore Indonesian language teachers' experiences in creating learning environments that motivate students, strengthen self-confidence, and reduce learning anxiety. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, this study seeks to uncover the meanings, reflections, and pedagogical considerations underlying affective classroom practices. Such an approach is expected to contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of

affective language learning but also to the development of more contextually grounded and pedagogically relevant strategies for Indonesian language education.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore Indonesian language teachers' lived experiences in fostering students' motivation, self-confidence, and reduced learning anxiety. A phenomenological approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of the subjective meanings teachers construct from their teaching experiences. Specifically, the study adopted an interpretative phenomenological perspective, which focuses on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. This approach originates from Husserl's (1970) phenomenology, was further developed through Heidegger's (2005) hermeneutic tradition, and has been widely applied in qualitative research by Smith et al. (2021).

Interpretative phenomenology is characterized by its idiographic focus on detailed individual experiences, its emphasis on lived experience as the primary source of data, and its interpretive analysis of meaning within social, cultural, and psychological contexts. Consequently, this approach is particularly suitable for investigating teachers' experiences in language learning contexts (Tai & Wang, 2025; Tang, 2025; Tai, 2025).

Participants and Selection Techniques

Participants in this study are Indonesian language teachers at elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels who have at least 3–5 years of teaching experience. The selection of participants was carried out through *purposive sampling* techniques with the following criteria: 1) active teachers who teach Indonesian, 2) have experience in implementing learning strategies oriented to affective aspects (motivation, confidence, or anxiety management of students), and 3) willing to share experiences in depth. The number of participants was 20 teachers spread across various regions of Indonesia. This number is in accordance with the characteristics of phenomenological research that emphasizes the depth of data rather than the number of participants. The demographic data of the respondents in this study can be presented in Table 1 **below**.

Table 1
Respondent Demographic Data

No	Initial	Age	Education	Working unit	Working Period
1	AS	29 years and 7 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	8 years
2	BR	43 years 0 months	Master's Degree	Junior High	25 years
3	DY	45 years 9 months	Master's Degree	Junior High	7 years
4	SN	42 years 10 months	Master's Degree	Elementary School	22 years
5	RY	36 years 11 months	Master's Degree	Junior High	12 years
6	S	40 years 0 months	Master's Degree	Vocational School	17 years
7	EBDE	42 years 2 months	Master's Degree	Junior High	20 years
8	DS	33 years 8 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	2 years
9	DM	24 years 10 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	3 years
10	ES	49 years 8 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	20 years
11	EF	36 years 6 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	11 years
12	IU	39 years 8 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	5
13	EKA	49 years 8 months	Master's Degree	Junior High	16
14	A	52 years 1 month	Master's Degree	Junior High	8
15	FH	30 years 6 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	1
16	MZM	31 years 10 months	Master's Degree	Senior High	9
17	S	36 years 11 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	15
18	S	26 years 2 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	9
19	SAM	24 years 11 months	Bachelor Degree	Junior High	2
20	YGP	49 years 8 months	Master's Degree	Junior High	16

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore teachers' subjective experiences. This method is appropriate for phenomenological research because it facilitates rich descriptions of participants' experiences, emotions, and meanings while enhancing research credibility (Lopes et al., 2025). The interviews focused on teachers' efforts to foster students' self-confidence, enhance motivation, and reduce learning anxiety. The interview guide was developed based on Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, and Horwitz's (2001) theory of

language anxiety. Open-ended questions were designed according to these theoretical constructs and are presented in

Table 2.

Table 2

Interview Instruments of Teachers' Experiences in Motivating, Fostering Confidence, and Reducing Students' Anxiety

Category	Indicator	Interview Questions
Student confidence	Teachers' efforts to build confidence in students' abilities	How do you help students to feel confident that they are capable of completing language learning assignments?
	Strategies for providing successful experiences	What strategies do you use to give students a successful learning experience?
	A form of feedback that reinforces confidence	How you provide feedback to strengthen student confidence?
	Handling students who lack confidence	What do you do when students feel incapable or lack confidence?
	Teachers' experience in increasing students' self-confidence	What was your experience when students showed increased self-confidence, and what did you do then?
Student learning motivation	The relationship between learning and students' future goals	How do you help students relate language learning to their goals or future?
	Strategies for creating engaging learning	What strategies do you use to make learning more engaging and motivating for students?
	Management of academic demands	How do you manage academic demands to keep students motivated?
	Effective learning experiences increase motivation	What kind of learning experiences are most effective in increasing student motivation in your classroom?
	Efforts to maintain consistency of student motivation	How do you keep students motivated to stay consistent throughout the learning process?
Language learning anxiety	Identify students who experience anxiety	How do you recognize students who experience anxiety in language learning?
	Creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere	What do you do to make students feel comfortable communicating in class?
	Management of learning evaluations	How do you manage evaluation activities so as not to cause excessive anxiety?
	Strategies to reduce the fear of negative judgments	What are your strategies to reduce students' fear of negative judgments?
	Experience helps students cope with anxiety	What is your experience in helping students who are initially anxious to become more confident?

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1969) phenomenological method, which seeks to uncover the meaning of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The analysis involved seven stages: reading transcripts repeatedly, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering meanings into themes, developing an exhaustive description, constructing the essential structure of the experience, and conducting member checking to validate interpretations. The process began with iterative reading to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and emotional contexts. Significant statements related to teachers' efforts to enhance self-efficacy, motivation, and reduce anxiety were coded and interpreted to identify underlying pedagogical meanings. These meanings were then organized into broader themes and synthesized into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. To ensure trustworthiness, peer debriefing was conducted with experts in qualitative research and language education to review coding, theme development, and interpretations, thereby minimizing researcher bias and strengthening analytical rigor.

Results

Based on the research that has been conducted, some data were obtained on the various experiences of Indonesian language teachers in fostering confidence, increasing motivation, and reducing students' anxiety in carrying out learning. Data on the various efforts of Indonesian language teachers can be presented through thematic coding, supported by the opinions or answers of the teachers when interviewed. The data in question can be accessed through the following Table 3.

Table 3
Teachers' efforts in fostering students' self-efficacy

No	Theme	Respondent's Statement	Thematic Interpretation
1	Scaffolding Learning	"I break down big tasks into small steps." (R14)	Teachers help students cope with difficult tasks through step-by-step help
2	A phased approach	"Big tasks are broken down into small steps so that students can succeed more easily." (R18)	Teachers build students' sense of ability slowly and realistically
3	Success experience	"The experience of completing this small task builds self-confidence." (R14)	Teachers create small success experiences to build confidence
4	Positive reinforcement	"I give specific and sincere praise." (R17)	Teachers strengthen confidence through verbal appreciation
5	Supportive feedback	"Feedback should make students feel capable." (R18)	Teachers provide constructive and motivating corrections
6	Appreciation of the learning process	"Focus on praising effort and process." (R19)	Teachers value effort and development, not just the end result
7	Reinforcement of self-efficacy	"I help students to believe that they can thrive." (R20)	Teachers instill confidence that abilities can develop
8	Progress visibility	"I show the development of student writing." (R18)	Teachers help students see their progress in real life
9	Growth mindset	"Mistakes are a natural part of learning." (R15)	Teachers normalize mistakes as part of the learning process
10	Personal assistance	"I pay more attention to students." (R20)	Teachers provide individualized support as per student needs

The thematic classification shows that teachers' efforts in fostering student self-efficacy are not only carried out through academic performance demands, but also through learning that is supportive, gradual, and oriented to the experience of student success. Teachers act as facilitators who help students build a positive perception of their abilities through emotional support, positive reinforcement, and safe learning experiences. Thematically, the entire subtheme leads to the formation of a pedagogical environment that allows students to feel capable, appreciated, and develop in the language learning process. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Teachers' efforts to increase students' motivational self-system

No	Theme	Respondent's Statement	Thematic Interpretation
1	Future relevance	"I associate learning with future professions." (R14)	Teachers connect language learning with students' futures
2	Career orientation	"Learning a language can open the door to students' future." (R18)	Teachers demonstrate the benefits of language skills in the world of work and life
3	Meaningful learning	"Language learning is not just grammar." (R17)	Teachers create learning that is relevant to students' lives
4	Contextual media	"I use short videos, popular songs, or memes." (R14)	Teachers use media that is close to the world of students
5	Gamification of learning	"Gamification turns boring tasks into fun." (R19)	Teachers create a fun and challenging learning atmosphere
6	Project-Based Learning	"Project-based learning increases student motivation." (R14)	Teachers engage students in authentic and collaborative projects
7	Authentic products	"Students are more enthusiastic when creating podcasts or videos." (R19)	Teachers encourage students to produce real work
8	Interactive learning	"I use roleplay and simulation." (R11)	Teachers increase students' active involvement in learning
9	Digital contextualization	"I associate learning with social media." (R7)	Teachers integrate digital culture in learning
10	Strengthening motivation	"I celebrate small students' wins." (R14)	Teachers maintain students' enthusiasm for learning through appreciation
11	Normalization of errors	"I establish that mistakes are proof of learning." (R14)	Teachers build students' courage to try without fear of being wrong

The thematic classification shows that teachers' experiences in increasing student motivation are centered on efforts to create relevant, meaningful, and close learning to students' lives. Teachers motivate students not only through verbal encouragement but also through creative, contextual, and participatory learning designs. The use of digital media, gamification, authentic projects, and interactive learning helps students see language learning as an engaging experience and has value for their future. Thematically, the subtheme shows that student motivation is constructed through the connections among learning experiences, self-identity, and students' future orientation in language learning. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Teachers' efforts to reduce students' anxiety

No	Theme	Respondent's Statement	Thematic Interpretation
1	Safe classroom culture	"No one laughs when one makes a mistake." (R18)	Teachers create a learning atmosphere that is free from fear and ridicule
2	Interpersonal Approach	"I am warm and humorous." (R14)	Teachers build close and comfortable relationships with students
3	Teacher empathy	"I sat side by side and talked nicely." (R18)	Teachers understand and appreciate students' emotional states
4	Nonjudgmental correction	"I don't embarrass students in public." (R14)	Teachers avoid criticism that lowers students' self-esteem
5	Indirect correction	"Indirect repair techniques make students comfortable." (R19)	Teachers correct mistakes in a subtle and supportive way
6	Psychological safety	"Students are more likely to try if they are not afraid." (R19)	Teachers build a sense of security to try and argue
7	Identification of anxiety	"I recognize anxious students from a quiet and nervous attitude." (R9)	Teachers are sensitive to the signs of student anxiety
8	Small group support	"I use small group discussions." (R8)	Teachers reduce social pressure through group work
9	Reduction of study stress	"I create a relaxed classroom atmosphere." (R19)	Teachers reduce excessive academic stress
10	Humanist evaluation	"Evaluation is not a tool of punishment." (R14)	Teachers view evaluation as part of the learning process
11	Assessment for learning	"Evaluation is part of the learning process." (R18)	Teachers use evaluations to support student development

Discussion

Fostering Self-Efficacy in Language Learning

The findings indicate that Indonesian language teachers view self-efficacy as a fundamental prerequisite for successful language learning. Teachers believe that students are more willing to participate when they have confidence in their ability to complete learning tasks. Consequently, rather than demanding high performance from the outset, teachers gradually cultivate students' sense of competence through structured and achievable learning experiences. A dominant strategy identified in this study is scaffolding, which helps students manage tasks perceived as difficult or intimidating. As R14 explained, "I break down big tasks into small steps," while R18 similarly noted that "big tasks are broken down into

small steps so that students can succeed more easily.” These statements demonstrate teachers’ awareness that confidence develops progressively through repeated experiences of success.

The use of scaffolding enables students to achieve incremental accomplishments that become the basis for tackling more complex learning challenges. This finding aligns with van Nooijen et al. (2024), who argue that gradual learning supports cognitive load management by guiding attention and organizing information effectively. Similarly, Guo and Feng (2025) emphasize that scaffolding strategies including modeling, contextualization, schema-building, explanation, feedback, and metacognitive development are highly effective in language learning. In this context, teachers intentionally create learning pathways that allow students to experience competence before confronting more demanding tasks, thereby strengthening their belief in their own abilities.

Another important finding concerns the role of small success experiences in developing students’ self-efficacy. Teachers consistently emphasized that confidence is built through the accumulation of small achievements rather than through a single major accomplishment. As stated by R14, “the experience of successfully completing this small task builds up into self-confidence.” This perspective reflects a developmental view of learning in which success is understood as a continuous process rather than an end result. Previous studies support this finding, showing that recognizing and appreciating students’ achievements can enhance self-efficacy, motivation, and academic performance (Shen et al., 2026). Likewise, successful learning experiences contribute to positive self-perceptions and stronger beliefs about one’s capabilities (Ramesh & Klaiber, 2026). Consequently, language learning is positioned not as a competitive arena but as a developmental process that accommodates individual growth.

The findings further reveal that teachers strengthen students’ confidence through positive reinforcement and supportive feedback. Rather than focusing exclusively on correcting mistakes, teachers deliberately acknowledge effort, courage, and progress. R19 explained that teachers should “focus on praise for effort and process,” while R17 emphasized the importance of providing “specific and sincere praise.” Such practices illustrate a shift from performance-oriented pedagogy toward growth-oriented pedagogy. Students are encouraged to view mistakes as part of learning rather than as indicators of failure. Research by Kingsford-Smith et al. (2024) and Ferguson and McHenry-Sorber (2025) similarly demonstrates that recognition and support can enhance students’ resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy.

These findings support Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory, which identifies mastery experiences as a key source of self-efficacy. However, this study extends the theory by demonstrating that self-efficacy is also constructed through supportive pedagogical interactions and positive teacher–student relationships (Lübeck et al., 2025; Hinduja & Mohammad, 2025; Zee et al., 2024). The findings further reveal that confidence development is closely linked to emotional safety. Emotional and teacher support positively influence student engagement and self-efficacy (Quan et al., 2025; B. Xu, 2024). Therefore, self-efficacy should be viewed not only as a cognitive belief in competence but also as an affective experience shaped by supportive learning environments.

Increasing Motivational Self System through Meaningful Learning

The findings indicate that students' motivation to learn Indonesian increases when learning is perceived as relevant to their lives, personal identities, and future aspirations. Teachers consistently emphasized the importance of helping students understand the practical value of language skills beyond classroom requirements. This finding supports previous studies showing that learners become more motivated when language learning aligns with their self-concept and future goals (Kim, 2024; H. T. Huang & Chan, 2024; Aung & Nikolov, 2025; Y. Xu & Liu, 2026). Rather than focusing solely on mastery of linguistic content, teachers seek to demonstrate how language competence can contribute to students' personal and professional development. As R14 explained, "I associate learning with the profession of the future," while R18 stated that "learning a language can open the door to students' future." These statements illustrate that teachers frame language learning as an investment in students' future identities and opportunities.

Another strategy used by teachers involves contextualizing learning materials to make them more meaningful and accessible. Teachers integrate social media content, short videos, popular songs, and memes into classroom activities so that learning resonates with students' everyday experiences. Such practices help bridge the gap between academic content and students' social realities. Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that student-generated memes can increase engagement and interest in learning (Abou-El-Sood, 2025), while platforms such as TikTok contribute to more dynamic and participatory learning environments (Lampe, 2023; Conde-Caballero et al., 2024; Rubenking et al., 2025). Through these approaches, teachers move beyond the traditional role of knowledge transmitters and become designers of meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, language learning is perceived not as an abstract academic task but as a practical and socially relevant life skill.

The findings further reveal that interactive and project-based learning significantly enhances students' motivation. Learning activities such as gamification, simulations, role plays, podcasts, and digital projects create opportunities for active participation and creativity. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that gamification and simulation can substantially improve student engagement and motivation (Dahalan et al., 2024; Alonso-Sánchez et al., 2025; Ma, 2024). As R19 stated, "gamification turns boring tasks into exciting," highlighting how motivation increases when students encounter enjoyable challenges and opportunities for self-expression. These activities transform learning from a passive process into an engaging experience that encourages sustained participation.

These findings support Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, which emphasizes the role of learners' ideal future selves in shaping language learning motivation. However, this study extends the theory by showing that motivation is sustained not only by future aspirations but also by positive daily learning experiences. Enjoyable classroom interactions, creative activities, and supportive teacher-student relationships play a crucial role in maintaining students' motivation. This finding aligns with studies indicating that everyday learning experiences significantly influence motivational development

(Yazdanifard et al., 2025) and that teacher competence contributes substantially to student motivation (Chen et al., 2025). Therefore, motivation is a dynamic and socially constructed process.

Reducing Anxiety through Psychological Safety and Humanist Evaluation

The findings indicate that language anxiety remains a major challenge in Indonesian language learning. Teachers reported that students often fear speaking, making mistakes, being ridiculed by peers, and receiving negative evaluations, which can hinder participation and self-expression. Therefore, reducing anxiety requires not only academic support but also the creation of an emotionally safe learning environment. Previous studies show that supportive classroom climates enhance engagement, learning outcomes, and students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy (Somerville et al., 2023; Voisin et al., 2023; McClintock et al., 2022). As reflected in R14's statement, "Mistakes are proof of learning," teachers normalize mistakes as part of learning, supporting Young's (1991) low-anxiety classroom perspective.

Beyond establishing a safe classroom culture, teachers employ empathetic and non-judgmental interpersonal approaches to help students feel more comfortable. Warm interactions, humor, gentle language, and personal communication are frequently used to reduce emotional pressure and encourage participation. Research suggests that humor, when applied appropriately and sensitively, can support students' emotional regulation and well-being (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2018; Stokke & Fiskum, 2026). Similarly, supportive attitudes and positive interpersonal communication contribute to lower stress levels and create more comfortable learning environments (Boman et al., 2025). As reflected in R18's statement, "I sit on a level and talk well," teachers intentionally position themselves as approachable and supportive rather than authoritarian figures. Such relationships are particularly important in language learning because language use inherently exposes learners to social evaluation and potential embarrassment.

The findings further reveal that teachers consciously avoid assessment practices that may humiliate students or intensify anxiety. Instead, corrections are often delivered indirectly, collaborative small-group activities are encouraged, and evaluation is implemented more flexibly through remedial opportunities, revisions, and process-oriented assessment. According to R19, "students are more daring to try if they are not afraid," highlighting the close relationship between emotional safety and students' willingness to participate. Teachers recognize that excessive performance pressure may strengthen anxiety and discourage language use, whereas supportive assessment practices encourage experimentation and risk-taking.

These findings support Horwitz's (2001) theory that fear of negative evaluation is a major source of language anxiety. However, this study extends the theory by showing that anxiety is not merely an individual psychological condition but is also socially and pedagogically constructed through classroom interactions and learning practices. The findings further align with the positive psychology perspective of Gabryś-Barker and Gałajda (2016), which emphasizes cultivating positive emotions rather than simply eliminating negative ones. Teachers therefore focus on creating psychologically safe learning

environments where students feel comfortable participating, making mistakes, and improving. Such psychological safety becomes a crucial foundation for fostering confidence, engagement, and effective language learning.

Integration of Strengthening Self-Confidence, Motivation, and Anxiety Reduction in Optimizing Learning Outcomes

The findings demonstrate that strengthening self-efficacy, enhancing motivation, and reducing anxiety are not independent processes but rather interconnected dimensions that collectively shape students' engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers do not perceive successful language learning merely as the mastery of linguistic content; instead, they view it as a pedagogical process that requires emotional readiness, confidence, and an internal willingness to learn. Students who feel capable, motivated, and psychologically secure are more likely to participate actively, take communicative risks, and engage meaningfully in learning activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that supportive learning environments reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and contribute positively to academic achievement and student retention (Voisin et al., 2023; Elov et al., 2025).

Within this process, self-efficacy emerges as the foundation for student engagement. Through scaffolding, positive reinforcement, and supportive feedback, teachers create opportunities for students to experience success gradually. These experiences strengthen students' beliefs in their own capabilities and encourage them to approach learning challenges with greater confidence. Conversely, students who doubt their abilities are more likely to avoid participation, demonstrate low engagement, and withdraw from learning activities. These findings reinforce Bandura's (2009) social cognitive theory, which emphasizes that behavior is influenced by the interaction between environmental conditions and individual beliefs. Empirical studies further support this relationship, indicating that self-efficacy positively predicts engagement, persistence, and achievement in language learning contexts (Cai & Xing, 2023; S. Li, 2024; Liang et al., 2025; Song & Wang, 2026).

Motivation serves as a key mechanism for sustaining students' engagement after confidence has been established. Teachers enhance motivation by creating contextual, creative, and meaningful learning experiences that connect language learning with students' interests, future aspirations, and real-life situations. Such relevance encourages students to invest greater effort and persist in learning tasks. Previous studies similarly emphasize the role of motivation in promoting engagement and academic success (Kucharcikova et al., 2019; Alismail & Almulla, 2025). However, motivation alone is insufficient when students experience high anxiety. Fear of mistakes and negative evaluation can inhibit participation, highlighting that motivation is dynamic and strongly influenced by classroom experiences and emotional conditions (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2023; Hennebry-Leung et al., 2023; Z. Li, 2025).

Anxiety reduction is essential for enabling self-efficacy and motivation to develop optimally. Teachers foster psychological safety through supportive classroom cultures, empathetic communication, flexible assessment, and the normalization of mistakes as part of learning. Such practices encourage students

to ask questions, experiment with language, and accept feedback without fear of embarrassment. As anxiety decreases, students become more willing to participate, gain positive learning experiences, and strengthen their confidence and motivation. These findings support Horwitz's (2001) theory that fear of negative evaluation is a major barrier to language learning. They also align with studies showing that positive emotions significantly enhance motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Leng & Zhang, 2024; Enferad et al., 2025; H. Chen et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that effective language learning should be viewed as a holistic pedagogical-affective process rather than a purely cognitive activity. Self-efficacy strengthens students' belief in their ability to succeed, motivation sustains their engagement, and reduced anxiety creates the emotional conditions necessary for active participation. Accordingly, teachers serve not only as instructional facilitators but also as affective facilitators who create safe, meaningful, and empowering learning environments. This perspective is supported by previous studies highlighting the importance of emotional well-being, psychological resilience, social support, and positive emotional regulation in language learning success (Xiao et al., 2024; Marrone et al., 2024; Younas et al., 2025; Poedjiastutie et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Indonesian language teachers foster students' motivation, self-confidence, and reduced learning anxiety through humanistic and student-centered pedagogical practices. Teachers function not only as knowledge facilitators but also as emotional supporters who create safe, supportive, and non-judgmental learning environments. Students' self-efficacy is strengthened through scaffolding, gradual success experiences, and constructive feedback, while motivation is enhanced through contextual, meaningful, and engaging learning activities. The findings further reveal that psychological safety is a fundamental prerequisite for effective language learning, enabling students to participate actively, take risks, and learn from mistakes without fear of negative evaluation.

Conceptually, this study highlights that motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety are relationally constructed through pedagogical interactions rather than existing as isolated psychological factors. Therefore, language learning should be viewed not only as a cognitive and linguistic process but also as an affective practice that prioritizes students' emotional well-being. These findings provide important implications for developing more supportive and reflective language learning environments.

Declarations

Consent to Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers prior to their participation in this phenomenological study. The participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the

study, including the interview process, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the intended use of the data. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the interviews and to have their responses used for research purposes. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the research and reporting process.

Ethics Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. HAMKA. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and applicable institutional ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests that could have influenced the research, its findings, or the publication of this manuscript.

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Author Contribution

Author Contributions Statement Imam Saf'i: Conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, investigation, writing original draft, writing review and editing, and project administration. Soraya: Investigation, data collection, data analysis, literature review, and writing review and editing. Sobri: Methodology, data interpretation, validation, writing review and editing, and supervision. All authors contributed substantially to the development of the study, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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