

Reframing EFL Pedagogy via Student Voices: A Reflexive Thematic Study of Non-Cognitive Dimension

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Abstract

Background:

Learner autonomy and engagement are fundamental to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. However, relational, emotional, and pedagogical factors in shaping students' experiences remain underexplored in Southeast Asian higher education. Thus, this study investigates how second-year EFL learners experience and interpret emotionally responsive, participatory, and relationally grounded teaching practices. It further examines how these practices enhance learners' engagement, psychological safety, and agency in English learning.

Methodology:

A qualitative approach was employed with 95 law students in a compulsory English course at Universitas Borneo Tarakan. Data were collected through reflective journals, interviews, and classroom observations. A reflexive thematic analysis explored how the learners experienced and interpreted emotionally responsive, participatory, and relationally grounded teaching practices.

Findings:

Six interrelated pedagogical dimensions were identified learners' experiences as follows: Voice (student involvement in learning design), Simplicity (focused on activities and essential material), Experience (theory enacted through real tasks), Upliftment (emotional encouragement), Objectivity (inclusive opportunities and progress-based scoring), and Accessibility (responsive support). Within these dimensions, the lecturer's consistent reinforcement and availability were pivotal in fostering trust and psychological safety, enabling learners to engage confidently and assume ownership of their learning.

Conclusion:

Non-cognitive dimensions, enacted through consistent pedagogical practice, serve as a foundational framework for effective EFL instruction. Pedagogical consistency reinforces emotional presence, learner agency, and relational trust, creating classrooms where students feel safe, supported, and actively engaged.

Originality:

The study offers a student-derived, empirically grounded framework of non-cognitive EFL pedagogy that foregrounds affective-relational processes such as voice, psychological safety, and consistency as the central mechanism of engagement, distinguishing it from predominantly cognitive or teacher-led models.

Keywords : Non-Cognitive Pedagogy; Learner Voice; Teacher Identity; Pedagogical Consistency

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although communicative and student-centered approaches have gained global prominence, recent syntheses indicate that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in many Southeast Asian and other postcolonial higher education contexts remains predominantly teacher-controlled and assessment-driven ([Phuong et al., 2025](#); [Phuong et al., 2024](#)). Such models prioritize grammar delivery, textbook input, and examination preparation, while offering limited attention to learners' emotional security, sense of belonging, or opportunities for meaningful participation elements increasingly recognized as central to affective engagement and relational pedagogy ([Mercer & Gregersen, 2020](#); [Oxford, 2016](#)). Although cognitively oriented instruction can enhance discrete language skills, little is known about how learners experience the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of such classrooms, particularly in under-resourced universities where anxiety, silence, and disengagement are common yet under-theorized ([Lamb & Wedell, 2015](#); [Maher & King, 2022](#)). This gap highlights the need to examine the affective–relational conditions that determine whether students persist, withdraw, or thrive in EFL learning ([Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014](#); [Heckman & Kautz, 2012](#); [Mercer & Gregersen, 2020](#)).

In response to these limitations, recent scholarships have foregrounded affective and relational constructs such as psychological safety, student voice, collaborative belonging, and teacher immediacy as essential to sustained engagement and willingness to communicate ([Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014](#); [Mercer & Gregersen, 2020](#); [Oxford, 2016](#)). Frameworks, including Positive Language Education ([Mercer, 2021](#)), Social–Emotional Learning, and Relational Pedagogy ([Hickey & Riddle, 2022](#)), have advanced the case for embedding well-being and connection within instructional design. More recent empirical work ([Patall et al., 2024](#)) further demonstrates that behavioral consistency and sustained teacher responsiveness significantly reinforce learner motivation and engagement, suggesting that relational stability is as crucial as instructional clarity. However, these models often remain conceptual or policy-oriented, providing limited insight into how relational practices are enacted in everyday classroom interaction. In Southeast Asian EFL settings, where curricula remain exam-oriented and interactional norms are shaped by hierarchy and deference ([Lamb, 2017](#); [Wahyuningsih et al., 2023](#)), empirical clarity is still lacking on how engagement is negotiated within authentic teacher–student relationships, rather than being assumed through methodological prescriptions.

Addressing this need, the present study forms part of an ongoing research trajectory that has consistently demonstrated the value of integrating explicit instructional guidance with

relational scaffolding to foster learner autonomy ([Eppendi et al., 2025](#)). Earlier phases examined redesigned learning contracts and assessment systems, which proved especially effective for students who were already self-directed. Yet subsequent observations revealed that learners with initially low motivation responded more positively to non-cognitive lecturer behaviors such as consistency, availability, and emotional presence. These findings suggested that relational attunement may serve as a key catalyst for engagement, particularly among learners who are not immediately receptive to structured pedagogical intervention.

Specifically, this study aimed to investigate how second-year EFL undergraduates at an Indonesian public university perceive and interpret emotionally responsive, participatory, and relational teaching practices, and how these practices shape their engagement, psychological safety, and learner agency. Drawing on reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, the study employs cross-instrument thematic analysis informed by relational pedagogy ([Noddings, 2003](#)), affective engagement theory ([Mercer & Gregersen, 2020](#)), and sociocultural perspectives on learner identity ([Norton, 2013](#)). The goal is to develop a learner-derived model of affective–relational pedagogy grounded in students' lived experiences rather than in abstract theorization.

Beyond conceptual advancement, the study also aims to translate its findings into practice through the creation of a rubric of relational teaching moves, guidelines for emotionally responsive assessment, and principles for inclusive task scaffolding. These outputs are expected to inform teacher development and curriculum reform in exam-oriented EFL systems. By centering student perspectives, this inquiry bridges affective theory and classroom practice, illustrating how emotionally attuned and participatory pedagogy can support a more humanizing and sustainable EFL learning environment ([Norton, 2013](#)).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design situated within an interpretivist–constructivist epistemological stance, which assumes that classroom realities are socially constructed through learners' subjective experiences rather than externally observable variables ([Colorafi & Evans, 2016](#); [Sandelowski, 2000](#)). Rather than seeking to generate abstract theory, the study aimed to provide a rich, low-inference account of students' lived responses to teaching practices, consistent with prior research in language education on learner emotions and classroom relationships ([Alrabai & Algazzaz, 2024](#); [Kayı-Aydar, 2018](#); [Song et al., 2022](#)). Data collection and meaning making

were guided by a Reflective Inquiry framework ([Farrell, 2018](#); [Rodgers, 2002](#)), wherein students' written reflections, dialogic interviews, and researcher field notes served as collaborative sites of interpretation. Reflection was thus operationalized not as researcher introspection but as a co-constructed narrative process through which learners articulated how they felt, interpreted, and positioned themselves within affective and relational classroom interactions. This approach aligned with Reflective Thematic Analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2019](#)), chosen for its capacity to capture emotional nuance, embodied experience, and relational meanings essential for examining constructs such as psychological safety, agency, and belonging. The study was conducted under an official university research contract. All participants provided informed oral consent, and procedures adhered to institutional expectations regarding confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respectful treatment of student data.

2.2. Participants

The participants were 95 fourth-semester undergraduate students (aged 19-21) from a university in Indonesia, comprising 66 females and 29 males. A pretest (maximum score = 100) administered at the start of the semester showed that most students scored between 0 and 25, with 10 students scoring between 30 and 40, indicating generally low English proficiency levels. All participants were enrolled in a compulsory general English course, designed for non-English majors and delivered over a 14-week semester. Instruction focused on communicative, reflective, and participatory teaching strategies aligned with learner-centered EFL principles ([Nunan, 1991](#); [Richards & Rodgers, 2014](#)). Participants were selected using total population sampling to ensure full class representation ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). Most students self-identified as having beginner to pre-intermediate English proficiency, with varied prior exposure to formal English instruction a factor commonly noted in regional EFL contexts ([Widodo, 2016](#)).

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using three complementary qualitative instruments reflective journals, focus group discussions (FGDs), and structured classroom observations to enable data triangulation and deepen interpretive validity ([Denzin, 2017](#); [Patton, 2015](#)). Ninety-five students submitted bi-weekly reflective journals in Bahasa Indonesia, guided by prompts on instructional clarity, emotional responses, relational dynamics, and engagement; entries were

translated into English and cross-checked with a bilingual colleague. Reflective journaling is widely recognized as an effective means of assessing learners' affective and cognitive engagement ([Farrell, 2018](#); [Moon, 2006](#)). To expand on emerging themes, three FGDs were conducted with 8-10 voluntary participants each, following a semi-structured protocol that balanced thematic continuity with openness to emergent dialogue ([Morgan, 1997](#)); discussions were held in Bahasa Indonesia, moderated by the lecturer-researcher, and audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated. Structured classroom observations were conducted across five sessions using an adapted interaction rubric based on established classroom observation frameworks ([Cohen et al., 2002](#); [Wragg, 1999](#)). Data were collected by trained student observers rather than the instructor to minimize bias. While the lecturer-researcher remained present in the classroom, efforts were made to minimize disruption and maintain ecological validity ([Simons, 2009](#)). Each session was simultaneously recorded via an unlisted YouTube livestream, enabling verification of observation notes. Participants were verbally informed of all procedures and provided oral consent for the use of classroom footage, which would be used strictly for research purposes.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)) with an inductive-latent coding approach. Reflective journals, FGD transcripts, and observation sheets were read repeatedly while taking analytic notes ([Tracy, 2010](#)). Initial codes were generated manually by the researcher, with 20% of the dataset reviewed through peer debriefing to enhance reflexive rigor rather than statistical reliability ([Nowell et al., 2017](#)). Codes were iteratively organized into candidate themes, with an audit trail documenting code evolution and analytical decisions. Theme development prioritized conceptual salience over frequency, and minority or disconfirming cases were retained to provide theoretical contrast ([Braun & Clarke, 2021](#)). Cross-case comparisons were conducted across all instruments to assess consistency. The analysis yielded six thematic dimensions, Voice, Simplicity, Experience, Upliftment, Objectivity, and Accessibility, which were integrated into a provisional model mapping how specific pedagogical practices shaped learners' emotional and engagement outcomes.

3. FINDINGS

This study employed a cross-instrument thematic analysis to explore how instructional practices, classroom climate, and relational dynamics enhance EFL learners' engagement and perceptions during their fourth-semester English classes. Six interrelated themes were found based on interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations. These themes illustrate how learners experienced emotionally responsive, participatory, and relationally grounded teaching practices, highlighting the mechanisms through which engagement, psychological safety, and learner agency were fostered.

3.1. Theme 1. Emotional Safety through Encouraging Language and Relational Presence

Students consistently emphasized the emotional safety they experienced in the classroom because of the lecturer's encouraging language and supportive interpersonal stance. These practices were not merely reactive but sustained and deliberate, fostering a learning atmosphere in which students felt seen, heard, and motivated to participate despite linguistic insecurities. One student reflected:

"I once mispronounced a word during a presentation, and I thought I would be scolded. But the lecturer gently corrected me and said 'Wow, finally you try, thank you' using it as a learning opportunity for everyone." (Reflective Journal - Student 19)

Another described the feeling of being validated and emotionally supported: *"I felt heard. The lecturer gave me a chance to correct my mistakes without judgment and reassured me, 'it is okay to be wrong, the important thing is trying because your mistakes teach lessons to your friends.' This helped the learning go smoothly."* (Reflective Journal - Student 21)

These emotional reinforcements were often embedded in the lecturer's mantras and motivational discourse:

"I still remember what the lecturer kept saying from the beginning: 'Process, process, process, and also, do not worry, I am always there for you.' That made me feel motivated because it created a sense of comfort from day one." (Interview - Student 7)

Although observation notes did not transcribe all verbal interactions, the lecturer's consistent use of positive non-verbal reinforcement was evident, such as the observation at Week 5, where the lecturer clapped after each student presentation and gave supportive verbal feedback.

Across journals and FGDs, students repeatedly described the lecturer's responses as "comforting," "motivating," and "never blaming," even when they made errors. Observation notes recorded frequent moments where mistakes were reframed as "signs of progress," with encouragement such as "Good attempt, try again." Several learners reported feeling "brave to

speak even if wrong” and “not scared of correction.” Rather than perceiving feedback as judgment, they experienced it as support. In practice, this emotionally attuned communication served as an uplift, shifting learners from a fear of failure to a willingness to participate and persist ([Bandura, 1997](#); [Noddings, 2003](#); [Schunk, 2012](#)).

3.2. Theme 2. Instructional Clarity and Scaffolded Simplicity for Cognitive Accessibility

Feedback patterns were highly consistent across data sources rather than arising from isolated individual impressions. Students repeatedly noted that the lecturer simplified complex content without diluting conceptual rigor by using slow-paced delivery, repetitive clarification, bilingual scaffolding, and contextually grounded examples. These strategies rendered abstract grammar rules and unfamiliar vocabulary more comprehensible and less intimidating, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

One student reflected:

“I understand better when things are explained slowly and step-by-step.” (Reflective Journal - Student 19)

Another described how contrastive examples supported understanding:

“The lecturer gave examples comparing ‘I go to school’ and ‘I went to school’, so we could understand the difference.” (Reflective Journal - Student 8)

Reinforcing this theme, a student noted the lecturer’s responsiveness to confusion:

“Even if we were confused, the lecturer would repeat the explanation using simpler words or switch to Bahasa.” (Reflective Journal - Student 15)

Interview data echoed these reflections:

“He explained it word by word, with English and the meaning, so it became clearer.” (Interview - Student 5)

“I found it easy to follow the lessons because the teacher always used concrete examples and did not rush.” (Interview - Student 11)

Classroom observation also confirmed this approach, where the lecturer explained grammar rules using contextualized examples, pausing to check student understanding. All students remained attentive and responsive (Observation at Week 3).

This theme exemplifies the simplicity dimension of the non-cognitive pedagogical framework. Rather than reducing complexity to superficiality, the educator sequenced instruction to match students’ processing capacities, thus scaffolding complexity in cognitively accessible ways. This instructional practice resonates with the Zone of Proximal Development

([Vygotsky, 1978](#)) and Cognitive Load Theory ([Sweller, 1994](#)), which emphasize that meaningful learning occurs when instructional demands are aligned with learners' readiness. Additionally, this approach reflects the learner-sensitive design advocated by Tomlinson ([1999](#)) in her model of differentiated instruction.

In this context, pedagogical simplicity functions not as a simplification in academic challenge but as an intentional act of cognitive accessibility where the teacher enables early-stage EFL learners to approach complex material with clarity, confidence, and sustained engagement.

3.3. Theme 3. Cultivating Belonging through Instructional Responsiveness

Across journals, interviews, and observations, a majority of students, not merely a select few, emphasized that their ideas were actively appreciated and incorporated into classroom instruction. While a small number of students preferred a more transparent structure over a choice-based approach, most described a heightened sense of ownership when allowed to influence aspects such as task selection, content focus, or assessment formats. One student shared, *"From the beginning, the lecturer asked us what we wanted to focus on speaking, reading, or writing. We chose speaking, and he really adjusted the lessons to fit that."* (Interview - Student 26).

Another reflected on the value of having student ideas implemented:

"Tasks like 'A Day in My Life' and the Uno game were our own suggestions. The lecturer actually implemented them." (Interview - Student 14)

This empowerment was also shown through differentiated task options:

Observation (Week 5): *Students were allowed to choose between video and written submissions. Participation and enthusiasm appeared higher during student-suggested activities.*

These findings suggest that the lecturer enacted a form of pedagogical voicing a learner-informed approach in which instructional design was shaped collaboratively with students. This practice is distinct from traditional top-down methods, as it foregrounds responsiveness to student interests, preferences, and linguistic readiness. In this context, voice operated as a pedagogical mechanism that cultivated belonging, agency, and motivation. It echoes Freire's ([1970](#)) dialogic pedagogy and intersects with learner-centered approaches in ELT ([Breen & Littlejohn, 2000](#); [Little, 1995](#)), while also offering an updated conceptualization of voice as participatory authorship of the learning experience.

3.4. Theme 4. Enacting Knowledge through Situated Practice

Across journals and interviews, most students stressed that their understanding of English strengthened through active performance rather than passive listening. While the value of practice-based learning is widely acknowledged in theory, what is distinct in this context is how performative tasks generate emotional accountability and relational motivation, rather than merely cognitive rehearsal. One student noted, *“During group practice, I felt responsible to my team. If I didn’t study, I would let them down, so I tried harder.”* (Reflective Journal - Student 37)

Another highlighted practice is a diagnostic and supportive mechanism, rather than just repetition:

“If I don’t try, I won’t know what I’m lacking. And the lecturer always said, ‘If you need help, just contact me.’” (Interview - Student 30)

Observational data reinforced that performance was not treated as an assessment but as a shared social effort:

Observation (Week 5): *Students engaged in presentations, speaking games, and project work. Participation was high, even among usually quiet students.*

These findings highlight that students’ learning was most effective when knowledge was applied through meaningful, socially supported practice ([Dewey, 1997b](#); [Kolb, 2014](#); [Vygotsky, 1978](#)). Rather than treating performance as an assessment, students and lecturers viewed it as a shared activity that fostered responsibility, confidence, and collaboration among them. The data consistently showed that learners became more engaged when language use was connected to real interaction and mutual support, helping them overcome initial anxiety and uncertainty. Such experiences suggest that active participation not only improved communicative ability but also strengthened students’ sense of belonging and emotional investment in the learning process.

3.5. Theme 5. Accessibility: Pedagogical Presence and Responsiveness Beyond the Classroom

Across journals and interviews, most students acknowledged the lecturer’s availability and willingness to assist not only during formal class time but also in informal settings and after scheduled hours. While this responsiveness reflected the practices of a single instructor rather than an institutional norm, it consistently emerged as a defining feature of how students

experienced support. One student recalled, *“I once asked for help with an assignment, and the lecturer made time for me after class. That really made me feel supported.”*

Another compared this experience to less responsive instructors:

“I think it was very reasonable, even impressive. Sometimes, when we message a lecturer, they don’t even respond. But this lecturer often reached out to us first. That’s rare and reassuring.”

(Interview - Student 21)

Support was also extended through constructive and restorative feedback:

“When we were struggling, the lecturer didn’t just give us a low score. Instead, he gave us feedback and suggestions to help us improve.” (Reflective Journal - Student 19)

Although not always visible during direct observation, recordings and observation sheets confirmed recurring reminders of availability, such as:

Observation (Week 4): *Lecturer reminded us that we could message with questions anytime and even offered to stay after class for additional support.*

These findings illustrate what may be termed pedagogical accessibility as a teaching disposition defined by consistent presence, proactive support, and emotional responsiveness that transcends the boundaries of class time. This concept builds on Bandura’s (1977) theory of social modelling, in which the teacher’s reliability fosters learner confidence, and Schunk (2012) emphasizes guided support to enhance self-efficacy. In the EFL context, pedagogical accessibility functions not merely as availability, but as an intentional ethic of presence a signal to students that support is both ongoing and unconditional in its encouragement, guidance, and emotional reassurance. As a result, the students came to view the learning space as emotionally safe and structurally dependable, enabling greater risk-taking, autonomy, and resilience across their English learning journey.

3.6. Theme 6. Pedagogical Fairness through Equitable Opportunities and Process-Oriented Assessment

The evidence of fairness was consistently articulated across both interviews and reflective journals. Multiple students independently used terms such as “fair” and “treated equally” to describe the lecturer’s approach, demonstrating that the notion of fairness emerged organically from learners’ own language rather than being applied analytically by the researcher. Their understanding of fairness was grounded in concrete classroom experiences,

such as being given speaking opportunities regardless of proficiency, being reintegrated after absences, and being evaluated on effort and improvement rather than fixed performance standards, *“We were tested one by one. Whether someone was already proficient or still learning, all of us were given the same chance. That made the class more interesting and encouraged us to learn.”* (Interview - Student 7)

“Even though I missed a few classes, the lecturer still gave me the same opportunity as others. It made me feel like I wasn’t left behind.” (Interview - Student 4)

“The lecturer noticed all our efforts, even small things. It felt like our work really mattered.” (Interview - Student 3)

Reflective journals supported this equitable approach, revealing a classroom atmosphere in which progress was recognized as individual and relative:

“Even when my grammar was still messy, the lecturer still gave me a chance to perform and corrected me calmly. It really motivated me to keep learning.” (Reflective Journal - Student 28)

“We weren’t compared to others but evaluated on our own progress. That felt fair.” (Reflective Journal - Student 32)

“Everyone was allowed to speak and do the task in front of the class, even those who were usually quiet.” (Reflective Journal - Student 14)

Observation data provided further support, particularly in the consistent monitoring and response to all student efforts:

Observation (Week 6): *“The lecturer listened carefully to student responses, provided differentiated feedback, and ensured every group presented at least once.”*

Observation (Week 9): *“Even students who struggled were encouraged to keep going. The lecturer gave helpful suggestions without judging anyone.”*

These findings reveal that the lecturer enacted what students perceived as a *fair pedagogy*, a sustained commitment to recognizing effort and growth rather than fixed ability ([Black & Wiliam, 1998](#); [Darling-Hammond, 2017](#); [Kieffer & Thompson, 2018](#); [Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2014](#); [Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023](#)). Fairness was not an abstract principle but an observable classroom practice: students described being corrected without humiliation, encouraged after mistakes, and acknowledged even for minor improvements. Rather than viewing objectivity as

detachment, learners experienced it as relational judgment being seen, supported, and evaluated according to their individual trajectory, rather than against a uniform benchmark. As reflected in the data, objectivity functioned not as neutrality but as *empathetic consistency*, a principled yet personalized approach that allowed students to feel simultaneously respected and accountable.

3.7. Central Insight: Pedagogical Consistency as a Foundational Mechanism

A unifying mechanism emerged across all six thematic dimensions: students consistently construed the lecturer as reliable and coherent in the enactment of pedagogical practices. This reliability encompassed the communication of expectations, provision of encouragement, delivery of feedback, and maintenance of accessibility beyond formal instructional hours ([Bandura, 1977](#); [Noddings, 2003](#); [Schunk, 2012](#)). Across emotional safety, instructional clarity, and scaffolded simplicity, participatory decision-making, experiential learning activities, extended relational support, and equitable assessment practices, learners consistently linked their cognitive understanding and affective confidence to the predictability of the lecturer's responses.

This constancy operated as both a structural and relational regulator within the classroom environment, fostering trust, predictability, and psychological safety. The stable and responsive teaching practices allowed students to engage without fear of failure, facilitating the reframing of English learning as a participatory and achievable process rather than a source of anxiety. Each dimension reinforced the others: clarity and scaffolded instruction supported emotional safety, which in turn enabled students to exercise agency and engage in experiential tasks. At the same time, relational accessibility and equitable assessment practices strengthened trust and motivation.

When enacted synergistically, these dimensions coalesced into a coherent, learner-centered instructional ecology, in which students perceived themselves as secure, supported, and increasingly responsible for their own learning trajectory. Pedagogical consistency thus functioned as a foundational mechanism, integrating the six dimensions into a cohesive framework that underpinned sustained engagement, relational responsiveness, and learner autonomy.

4. DISCUSSION

This study explored EFL learners' reflective accounts of their classroom experiences, revealing six interrelated pedagogical dimensions that shaped their motivation, confidence, and engagement. Patterns in the data indicate that humanistic, participatory, and emotionally

attuned teaching practices, manifested in explicit instruction, relational scaffolding, and supportive feedback, contributed to students' sense of psychological safety and agency, suggesting the potential of these non-cognitive approaches to complement traditional cognitive-focused instruction. Rather than positioning non-cognitive and cognitive dimensions as oppositional, the findings suggest that emotional safety, agency, relational support, and pedagogical clarity can enhance and scaffold learning processes typically emphasized in cognitive approaches, such as reasoning, recall, and linguistic accuracy (Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). These patterns are consistent with prior research, which demonstrates that affective and relational teaching strategies foster engagement, persistence, and self-efficacy in language learning (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Noddings, 2003), but few studies have offered a grounded, student-informed framework that articulates how these dimensions interact in real classroom settings.

Drawing systematically on students' written reflections, interviews, and classroom observations, the study inductively generated a six-dimensional model of non-cognitive pedagogy: Voice, Simplicity, Experience, Uplifting, Objectivity, and Accessibility. Each dimension reflects concrete evidence from learners' accounts, for example, recurrent references to feeling "seen" and supported, explicit appreciation for scaffolded explanations, and recognition of equitable assessment practices. These dimensions, while emerging from empirical data, align with foundational theories in educational psychology (Dewey, 1997a; Ryan & Deci, 2000), differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999), and affective language education, providing a conceptual lens to interpret how instructional and relational practices jointly foster inclusive, learner-centered environments in early-stage EFL contexts.

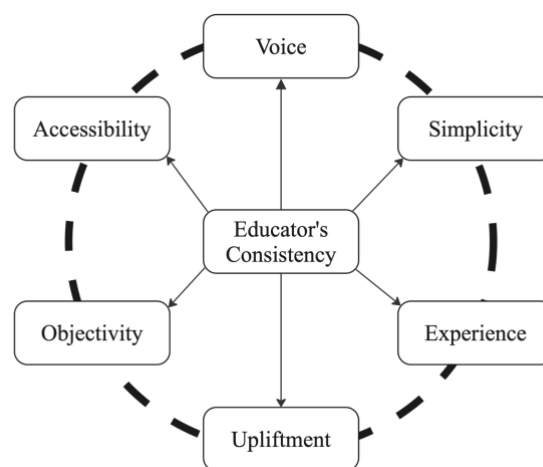


Figure 1: The dimensional model of non-cognitive pedagogy

The following sections critically explore how each of the six dimensions; Voice, Simplicity, Experience, Uplifting, Objectivity, and Accessibility manifested in the classroom context and contributed to a relational, emotionally supportive, and participatory learning environment.

4.1. Voice as a Foundation for Pedagogical Agency

The first theme highlighted how learner voice was authentically integrated into instructional decision-making. Rather than being passive recipients, students were actively invited to co-design activities and propose ideas related to both learning and evaluation scenarios. This repositioning of learners as epistemic agents resonates with Freire's (1970) notion of dialogic pedagogy and reflects the participatory orientation of learner-centered instruction (Ellis et al., 2019; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Importantly, voice in this study was not merely symbolic inclusion; students' suggestions were genuinely implemented, creating a sense of ownership and belonging. At the same time, the data reveal boundary conditions: not all proposed ideas were adopted, and some students expressed hesitation to contribute due to language insecurity or uncertainty about the lecturer's expectations. For example, one student noted, "*I sometimes did not speak up because I was not sure my idea was correct*" (Reflective Journal – Student 12). These contrastive accounts indicate that the enactment of Voice was mediated by students' confidence, prior experience, and linguistic readiness.

Such practices ensured that learning services were responsive to students' needs, interests, proficiency, and strengths, while still aligning with broader instructional objectives. This approach reflects what Barkhuizen's (2011) concept of "identity positioning," where learners' perspectives are legitimized as integral to the educational process, and echoes Farrell's (2018) view of teacher identity as dialogic, responsive, and co-constructed through student interaction. Collectively, the evidence suggests that promoting learner voice is not only empowering but also reshapes classroom power dynamics and teacher identity itself. In this study, Voice refers to how students' conditions, experiences, and ideas actively inform the design of learning scenarios, ensuring that instruction remains both responsive and relevant.

4.2. Simplicity: Instructional Simplicity for Cognitive and Emotional Accessibility

The second theme emphasized instructional simplicity, conceptualized here not as mere oversimplification, but as a strategic scaffolding mechanism that enhances both cognitive and emotional Accessibility. Students consistently reported that complex content was rendered comprehensible through step-by-step explanations, bilingual examples, and visual analogies,

practices aligned with cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) and zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). While existing frameworks in differentiated instruction advocate for adaptation to learners' readiness levels (Nunan, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999, 2014), the present data highlight the emotional dimension of Simplicity: learners reported reduced anxiety, increased confidence, and greater willingness to engage with challenging tasks. This intersection of cognitive and affective Accessibility represents a novel insight, showing how structured clarity simultaneously scaffolds comprehension and supports psychological safety. Instructional Simplicity in this study thus emerges as a dual-purpose strategy, carefully balancing content rigor with relational sensitivity, ensuring that learning remains both cognitively meaningful and emotionally supportive.

4.3. Experience: Experiential Learning as a Vehicle for Meaning-Making

While student voice empowered agency, experiential learning served as the primary medium through which knowledge was actively constructed and internalized. Structured tasks, such as role-plays, collaborative presentations, and interactive peer projects, enabled students to apply theoretical concepts in authentic contexts, reinforcing the principles of task-based learning (Ellis et al., 2019) and practice-based pedagogy (Larsen-Freeman, 2016). Beyond confirming established theories, the data reveal a novel aspect: the deliberate sequencing and scaffolding of experiential activities to simultaneously foster linguistic skill, peer accountability, and confidence. Students reported that these tasks encouraged risk-taking, reflection, and iterative improvement, suggesting that experiential learning in this context functioned not merely as practice but as a mechanism for meaning-making and self-regulated growth. It aligns with Dewey's (1997b) principle that Experience is central to education, while also extending engagement models (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012) by demonstrating how structured, interactive tasks in early-stage EFL classrooms can transform participation from performative compliance into deep, intrinsically motivated engagement. Moreover, these practices illustrate a reflective professional identity, wherein the lecturer designs learning as a co-experienced rather than unidirectional process, highlighting a relational and responsive approach to pedagogy.

4.4. Upliftment: Emotional Safety through Encouraging Language and Relational Presence

This dimension, termed pedagogical Upliftment, highlights how emotionally affirming language, gentle corrective feedback, and consistent relational presence fostered psychological

safety and growth-oriented engagement among EFL learners. Students repeatedly reported feeling recognized and supported, even when their contributions were partial or imperfect. One participant noted that corrections were framed as shared learning opportunities, thereby reducing the fear of failure. Another emphasized that the lecturer's sustained presence created trust and emotional security throughout the learning process. These observations extend existing affective education literature ([Bandura, 1977](#); [Bandura & Schunk, 1981](#); [Schunk, 2012](#)), and ethics of care frameworks ([Noddings, 2003](#)) by demonstrating empirically how relational and motivational practices are enacted in real-time EFL classrooms to scaffold both emotional and cognitive engagement. Unlike prior studies that often describe affective support in general terms, the current data reveal specific strategies such as personalized encouragement, gentle reframing of mistakes, and consistent availability that learners themselves perceive as uplifting, highlighting the operationalization of emotional safety in practice. Moreover, these findings contribute to the teacher identity literature ([Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009](#); [Day & Gu, 2007](#)), illustrating how emotional presence functions as a professional attribute that reinforces pedagogical efficacy and models a growth-oriented mindset. In sum, pedagogical Upliftment in this study represents not only the mitigation of anxiety but a mechanism for actively cultivating learner confidence, resilience, and motivation, thereby enriching our understanding of how relational teaching impacts early-stage EFL learners.

4.5. Objectivity: Objectivity as Developmental Fairness

Objectivity emerged as a distinct pedagogical dimension integrating fairness, differentiated assessment, and close attention to individual student progress. Students explicitly used terms such as “fair,” “balanced,” and “considering our effort” to describe the lecturer's assessment approach, indicating that perceptions of fairness were grounded in learners' own discourse rather than being analytically imposed. The lecturer consistently ensured that each student received learning opportunities in every session, allowing engagement at their respective pace and readiness, consistent with the principles of differentiated instruction ([Tomlinson, 2014](#)). Assessment practices were aligned with individual progress, recognizing variation in learning trajectories rather than applying uniform benchmarks of performance.

This orientation reflects the term of formative-oriented summative assessment, where evaluative processes are designed to sustain learning rather than merely record outcomes ([Carless & Boud, 2018](#); [Shepard, 2000](#)). It also affirms Tomlinson's ([2014](#)) principle that effective differentiation values growth and variability over standardization. Recent studies

demonstrate that students perceive fairness not only through consistent grading but also through relational transparency and responsiveness to individual effort ([Rasooli et al., 2025](#); [Rezai, 2022](#); [Sætre, 2025](#)). In this context, fairness becomes an interpersonal construct co-constructed through dialogue, trust, and teacher credibility rather than a purely procedural matter.

In culturally collectivist contexts such as Indonesia, where fairness is often equated with sameness, this developmental approach offers a culturally responsive model of equity ([Gay, 2010](#)). By maintaining attentiveness to each learner's developmental trajectory, the lecturer demonstrates a reflective teacher identity that resists deficit framing and affirms the potential for growth across diverse learners ([Pennington & Richards, 2016](#); [Yazan, 2022](#)). As a pedagogical dimension, objectivity therefore extends beyond grading; it embodies a stance of relational fairness, a principled sensitivity to students' individual progress, grounded in consistent, dialogic, and humane assessment practices.

4.6. Accessibility: Pedagogical Accessibility through Relational and Temporal Support

The final theme, pedagogical accessibility, highlights how the lecturer's consistent presence and responsiveness supported learners throughout the instructional process. Students repeatedly reported feeling that the lecturer was genuinely available, both during and beyond class hours, allowing them to ask questions without hesitation or fear. One student reflected, "I once asked for help with an assignment, and the lecturer made time for me after class. That really made me feel supported." Another contrasted this Experience with other instructors: "Sometimes, when we message a lecturer, they do not respond. However, this lecturer often reached out first; it was rare and reassuring." These accounts suggest that perceptions of accessibility were grounded in learners' lived experiences rather than being imposed by the researcher.

This dimension resonates with social cognitive and self-efficacy theories, which underscore the importance of perceived availability and relational support in sustaining motivation and persistence ([Bandura, 1997](#); [Schunk, 2012](#)). Recent scholarship in affective language education likewise emphasizes the role of relational presence and emotional ecology in fostering engagement and learner wellbeing ([Mercer, 2023](#); [Mercer & Gregersen, 2020](#)). In EFL learning contexts, teacher immediacy and rapport have been widely documented as predictors of engagement, emotional safety, and communicative willingness ([Xie & Derakhshan, 2021](#); [Zhou, 2012](#)). From the perspective of relational professionalism, such

responsiveness exemplifies a teacher's ethical and emotional attune to learners' needs, reflecting a sustained commitment to care, adaptability, and student-centered presence ([Kelchtermans, 2009](#); [Noddings, 2012](#)).

Mechanistically, accessibility reinforced the non-cognitive framework by providing relational and temporal scaffolding that sustained each of the preceding dimensions. By responding to student inquiries outside class, the lecturer validated contributions and strengthened Voice. Simplifying learning activities and focusing on essential content reduced cognitive overload and enhanced Simplicity, enabling students to engage deeply with core material. Support during experiential tasks facilitated risk-taking and active experimentation, reinforcing Experience, while consistent encouragement and guidance cultivated emotional safety and mitigated anxiety, underpinning Upliftment. Equitable attention and feedback beyond class promoted fairness in assessment, sustaining Objectivity.

Across all six dimensions, the lecturer's consistency acted as the central anchor, dynamically linking and sustaining their interplay, a notion supported by research identifying consistent teacher behaviours as key to learner trust, engagement, and psychological safety ([Blömeke & Olsen, 2019](#); [Patall et al., 2024](#)). Rather than following a fixed sequence, these dimensions emerged responsively according to classroom needs, with consistent practices reinforcing their mutual influence. Grounded in students' lived experiences, this framework illustrates how non-cognitive strategies, relational presence, differentiated scaffolding, and affective responsiveness operate synergistically to promote sustainable EFL learning, particularly in underrepresented educational settings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study addressed a persistent gap in Southeast Asian EFL research, where the emotional and relational dimensions of classroom interaction remain underexplored despite their importance for learner persistence and engagement. By foregrounding students' lived experiences, six interconnected non-cognitive dimensions: Voice, Simplicity, Experience, Upliftment, Objectivity, and Accessibility, were identified as central to psychological safety, agency, and active participation in English learning. Rather than existing as abstract ideals, these dimensions were implemented through observable practices that helped learners transition from passive reception to confident language use, particularly when sustained by Educator Consistency as the stabilizing force behind them. Future research is encouraged to apply and test this framework in school-based classrooms, particularly in contexts where disengagement or resistance is more prevalent. The findings collectively suggest that affective

engagement should not be treated as supplementary, but rather as a foundational element of effective language instruction, which warrants further validation in broader and more demanding educational settings.

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