A SHARED SPACE FOR EMOTION: A POETIC INQUIRY INTO INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This poetic inquiry aims to explore Indonesian EFL students' experiences and emotional landscapes in their English language learning process. In this study, eighteen Indonesian EFL non-English major university student participants were recruited following the ethical protocols. Data were collected through a combination of poetry and interviews, capturing a shared space where feelings, struggles, and aspirations can be voiced and collectively understood. A thematic analysis identified patterns and recurring themes in the poetry and interviews, enabling the participants to openly express how positive and negative emotions such as anxiety, pride, and hope shape their engagement with English and their evolving sense of self as language learners. The poetic process not only served as an interpretive method but also as an empathetic medium that honors participants' voices while revealing the relational and affective dimensions of language learning. The study demonstrates how poetic inquiry functions not only as a representational device but also as an interpretive and relational methodology that enables nuanced access to learners' affective worlds. By foregrounding poetic inquiry as both methodological and pedagogical practice, this research contributes to expanding approaches for understanding emotional and experiential dimensions of language learning in EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL learning experience, emotion, innovative pedagogy, poetic inquiry, poem

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is not merely a cognitive process, it is a deeply emotional to react and reflect on what learners learned as a powerful means of understanding personal experiences (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Hanauer, 2012; Iida, 2016). For many English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially in Indonesia, learning English entails navigating feelings of hope, pride, fear, and vulnerability. Yet, in most EFL research, the affective dimension of language learning tends to be neglected the emotive dimension of language learning and overshadowed by linguistic, pedagogical, or technological concerns (Kramsch, 2009). The emotional voices of learners often remain unheard, confined within academic categories rather than expressed as lived experiences. Recent developments in language education research have called for approaches that acknowledge emotion as central to language learning (Benesch, 2012; Pavlenko, 2013). Emotion shapes how learners perceive themselves, relate

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to others, and construct meaning through language. In Indonesian contexts, where English carries both symbolic prestige and cultural tension, students' emotional experiences are often intertwined with identity negotiation and social expectations (Fauziah et al., 2025; Kim & Kim, 2018; Rofiah et al., 2024).

Exploring how learners articulate their emotions can provide valuable insight into their engagement, motivation, and sense of belonging in the EFL classroom (Fauziah et al, 2025). Learners' emotional experiences are still underrepresented in qualitative research that centers students' own expressive forms and voices. Existing studies (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, 2001; Pavlenko, 2013) tend to privilege researcher-driven interpretation and conventional academic representation, leaving limited space for students to communicate the texture, intensity, and nuance of their feelings in ways that feel authentic to them. As a result, learners' emotional worlds are frequently described about them rather than expressed with them. Thus, to capture this affective dimension, this study employs poetic inquiry, a qualitative arts-based research methodology that uses poetry as both a mode of representation and a method of analysis (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009). Poetic inquiry allows the researcher to transform participants' narratives into poems that evoke rather than merely describe, making space for empathy, reflection, and shared understanding. Through this poetic lens, the study seeks to reimagine how EFL learners' emotions can be represented and understood, not as data points, but as embodied expressions of lived experience. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What emotions do Indonesian EFL students articulate in relation to their English language learning experiences?
2. How can poetry help to explore EFL students' awareness in language learning process?

This study explores how Indonesian EFL students experience and express their emotions in learning English, and how poeticizing these experiences can open a shared space for connection and meaning making. By weaving their voices into poetic form, the research aims to honor their stories and invite readers to feel with, rather than simply learn about, the participants.

As cultural constructions, emotions play a central role in shaping learners' engagement, motivation, and identity in second or foreign language learning (Dewaele, 2015; Pavlenko, 2013). Traditionally, affect in language learning was framed through psychological constructs such as anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy (Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). While these studies provided valuable insights, they often reduced emotion to measurable variables, overlooking its social, cultural, and relational dimensions (Benesch, 2012) that circulate and intersect in ELT and learning contexts. The complexity and contradictions of compassion, empathy, caring, and other emotions often associated with ELT would also make an important contribution to acknowledged emotions. The goal is to describe emotions as the effects of encounters among learners and their experiences in learning English. Recent research highlights that emotions are not isolated states but are socially constructed and contextually situated (Zhang & Gao, 2024; Swain, 2013). Positive emotion increased students' willingness to communicate, enable them to absorb more linguistic knowledge, and broaden language learners' mindsets (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2023; Pourgharib, & Shakki, 2024). Additionally, the enjoyment experiences in language learning trigger students' motivation and engagement to facilitate their resilience and well-being (Shakki, 2023; Pan, 2022). In ELT context, learners' emotions are often shaped by complex intersections of language ideology, cultural identity, and educational expectations (Lamb, 2012). English may symbolize opportunities and global belonging, yet it can also evoke feelings of inadequacy or cultural displacement (Norton, 2013). Understanding these emotional dynamics helps reveal how students negotiate their sense of self and belonging through language learning.

Poetic inquiry in language education is a way of using poetry to better understand the lives lived in the classroom. Rather than merely describing what we saw and heard in the classrooms, choosing poetic inquiry as our approach is to explore, analyze, and represent learners' emotional, identity-based, and lived experiences with language in ways traditional

academic writing cannot fully capture (Denzin, 2017; Görlich, 2016). Poetic inquiry has emerged as a meaningful form of arts-based qualitative research that employs poetry as a mode of inquiry, representation, and meaning-making (Prendergast et al., 2009; Faulkner, 2020). As a reflexive approach, poetic inquiry embraces the presence of the researcher in the research. It allows researchers to move beyond the limits of traditional prose by engaging with the affective and aesthetic dimensions of lived experience. Rather than presenting data as analytical categories, poetic inquiry evokes emotional resonance and invites readers to participate empathetically in the meaning-making process (Richardson, 1994). It supports both the investigation and communication of this experience in a particular and immediate way and enables the researchers to develop a more textured exploration than if using interview excerpts alone (Jack & Aithal, 2025). Poetic inquiry takes multiple forms of researcher-voiced poems, participant-voiced poems, and co-constructed poems (Glesne, 1997). In EFL education, it can serve both as a research tool and pedagogical practice that amplifies learners' emotional voices and fosters reflective awareness (Hanauer, 2010). Through the act of poeticizing, researchers and participants collaboratively create a space of vulnerability and authenticity where emotional experiences can be safely expressed and reimagined.

In recent years, poetic inquiry has been increasingly recognized for its potential to humanize language learning research (Hiltunen & Campbell, 2023). Hanauer's (2012) concept of "meaningful literacy" advocates for the use of poetry writing as a way for learners to connect their personal emotions with the target language, transforming learning into a process of self-expression and identity construction. Similarly, Langer and Furman (2004) and Burton (2025) argue that poetry facilitates emotional reflexivity, allowing students to articulate feelings that might otherwise remain unspoken in conventional academic discourse. Literature indicates a growing recognition of the affective and artistic dimensions of language learning. However, few studies have employed poetic inquiry to explore how Indonesian EFL students experience and articulate emotion. This study addresses that gap by using poetry not only as a methodological tool but as a shared emotional space, one that invites empathy, reflection, and a deeper understanding of the human experience of learning English.

METHODS

The Research Methods section describes in detail how the study was conducted. A complete description of the methods used enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of the research methodology. This study employed a poetic inquiry approach (Prendergast et al., 2009) to explore the emotional dimensions of Indonesian EFL students' language learning experiences. As a form of arts-based qualitative research, poetic inquiry uses poetry not only as a way of representing participants' voices but also as a method of knowing (Faulkner, 2020). It seeks to evoke rather than explain, to reveal emotional truth rather than abstract generalization (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Poetic inquiry was chosen for this study because it provides a creative and ethical space where students' emotional narratives can be transformed into evocative texts that honor their lived experiences. The goal was to poeticize participants' stories into found poems that reflect their emotional landscapes and open a shared space for empathy and understanding between researchers, participants, and readers.

The study took place in a private university in Aceh, Indonesia. Eighteen non-English major students were participated in this study to share their experiences in English classroom. Fourteen students were majoring Indonesian Language and Literature program and the rest were from *Pancasila* and Civic Education program. All the participants from this group learned English as a foreign language mostly in classroom formal education settings in their primary to secondary schools. All of them were females and have been studying English six to eleven years in their previous schools. The students' ages were between 18 and 34. This study was conducted in English general purposes course for the first-year university student during one 22-week semester in 2022/2023 academic year. To ensure confidentiality, the participants' actual names were substituted with the pseudonyms they selected. Participants were purposefully selected (Creswell & Poth, 2018) based on their willingness to reflect deeply on

their language learning experiences. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the process, including respect for participants' emotional safety and confidentiality.

All the participants were recruited using purposive sampling technique to ensure their relevance to the research focus on emotional experiences in EFL learning. The inclusion criteria required that participants (1) were currently taking or had recently completed a compulsory English course, (2) had prior experience learning English in formal educational settings, and (3) were willing to engage in both poetic writing and semi-structured interviews. Non–English major students were intentionally chosen because they typically engage with English as a required academic subject rather than a disciplinary specialization, which provides a context where emotional tensions, struggles, and attitudes toward English are often more visible. Participation was voluntary, and all students provided informed consent prior to data generation.

This study involved a series of 14 meetings starting from September 2022 to February 2023, each lasting 1.5 hours, conducted on a weekly basis. A total of ten meetings were taking a face-to-face mode in the classroom and four meetings were online reflection class about their project-based assignments. The classroom activities were structured into discrete stages, encompassing reading, collaborative writing, revising, and performing. Reading instructional model based on sociocultural theories of teaching and learning, which emphasize the role of readers' construction of meaning in reading through discussion and interaction with others. Interpretation occurred through a reflexive reading of the poems, focusing on recurring emotional themes such as anxiety, hope, belonging, and transformation. Analytical memos and reflective notes accompanied the poetic process, serving as interpretive bridges between data and emotion.

The next phase was collaborative writing that took four meetings. Following meaningful literacy instruction by Hanauer (2012), participants were asked to compose a poem about important memories of English language learning. All students chose Bahasa Indonesia (their first language) to share more vivid detail about their experiences. The teacher introduced Canva application as collaboration platform for their creative writing. The participants were interviewed individually about their experiences and the reasons for the importance of each memory immediately after the session. We conducted the interviews in Indonesian and then translated them into English. The interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. All participants' names have been replaced with their chosen pseudonyms (see Table 1). Revising phase took three meetings including English translation of their poems and visual background of their work page in Canva. In this context, the researcher (first author) is not a detached observer but a co-creator of meaning (Prendergast et al., 2009). Throughout this study, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal documenting personal emotions, assumptions, and aesthetic choices made during the poeticization process. This reflexivity ensured transparency in interpretation and alignment with the ethical and empathetic stance of arts-based inquiry.

Table 1. Students' Demographic Data

No	Pseudonym	Department	Year of study English
1	Dylla	Indonesian Language and Literature	11 years
2	Lany	Indonesian Language and Literature	11 years
3	**Gine**	**Indonesian Language and Literature**	**6 years**
4	**Zaly**	**Indonesian Language and Literature**	**11 years**
5	Ikha	Indonesian Language and Literature	6 years
6	Livy	Indonesian Language and Literature	11 years
7	Rizz	Indonesian Language and Literature	6 years
8	Mindy	Indonesian Language and Literature	6 years
9	Wulan	Indonesian Language and Literature	6 years
10	Anna	Indonesian Language and Literature	6 years
11	Alfy	Indonesian Language and Literature	11 years
12	**Windy**	**Indonesian Language and Literature**	**6 years**

No	Pseudonym	Department	Year of study English
13	Kya	Indonesian Language and Literature	6 years
14	Gadis	Indonesian Language and Literature	11 years
15	Izza	*Pancasila* and Civic Education	6 years
16	Berlian	*Pancasila* and Civic Education	6 years
17	Cahaya	*Pancasila* and Civic Education	6 years
18	**Rayn**	***Pancasila* and Civic Education**	**6 years**

In this study, both participant-produced poems and interview transcripts were treated as primary data. The analytical process proceeded in two interconnected layers rather than a strictly linear sequence. First, we conducted a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases. This involved: (1) Familiarization, we repeatedly read and reread the interview transcripts alongside the participant-created poems to gain a holistic understanding of the learners' emotional narratives. (2) Generating initial codes, emotionally salient words, metaphors, and expressions appearing across both datasets were identified and coded. (3) Searching for themes, codes were compared and clustered to identify recurring patterns of emotional experience. (4) Reviewing themes, emerging themes were iteratively checked against both poems and interview data to ensure coherence and representational adequacy. (5) Defining and naming themes, themes were refined to capture the underlying affective meanings of participants' experiences. (6) Writing up, the thematic structure informed the interpretive narrative of the findings. Second, poetic inquiry functioned not as a post-analysis transformation step but as a parallel interpretive practice. Poems were treated as both data and analytical devices. The poetic construction process involved deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction. This process enabled the researcher to engage deeply with participants' language, emotional textures, and meanings by reworking narrative fragments into poetic form while preserving experiential integrity. Importantly, poems were not derived from pre-established themes, nor were they used merely as illustrative outputs. Instead, thematic analysis and poetic inquiry informed one another recursively. Thematic coding helped identify patterns of emotional experience, while poetic reconstruction facilitated deeper interpretive engagement with nuance, intensity, and relational meanings that might remain obscured in conventional analytic representation.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, multiple strategies were employed. First, investigator triangulation was implemented through the active involvement of the second and third researchers. They participated in iterative analytic discussions, critically examining coding decisions, theme development, and interpretive claims. These collaborative exchanges served to challenge potential biases and strengthen the consistency and analytical rigor of interpretations. Second, dialogic engagement with participants was maintained throughout the research process. Emerging interpretations and narrative constructions were shared with participants, not merely for validation but as part of an interpretive refinement process. This approach allowed participants to clarify meanings, elaborate on experiential nuances, and provide additional reflections. Rather than functioning as a procedural member check alone, this dialogic practice contributed to deepening the relational and interpretive quality of the inquiry. Together, these strategies supported a more nuanced, credible, and contextually grounded understanding of participants' emotional experiences, aligning with qualitative principles of reflexivity, co-construction of meaning, and interpretive transparency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings portray English language learning as an experience shaped by a multidimensional emotional landscape, learner identity situated within social and cultural expectations, and learners' imagined futures. While the overall patterns across participants exhibit notable convergence, the analysis also reveals important tensions, fluctuations, and moments of ambivalence that complicate a purely harmonious reading of learners' emotional

experiences. The poetic texts evoke participants' inner affective worlds, whereas the interview data provide reflective elaborations and contextual grounding of those emotional expressions. The findings do not suggest a uniform or consistently positive orientation toward English. Although many participants articulated hope, aspiration, and attachment to the language, their narratives simultaneously disclosed emotional resistance, vulnerability, and oscillation between engagement and withdrawal. Several learners described feelings of emptiness, frustration, or self-doubt, particularly when their communicative intentions exceeded their perceived linguistic resources. These accounts indicate that learners' relationships with English are not linear but characterized by emotional cycles in which desire and discouragement coexist. Moreover, variations among participants highlight differing degrees of identification with English. For some learners, English symbolized opportunity and self-expansion, while for others it remained associated with pressure, inadequacy, or instrumental obligation. Such contrasts suggest that emotional experiences of language learning are inherently unstable and shaped by personal histories, social positioning, and imagined trajectories. Rather than contradictions in a strict sense, these differences reflect the dynamic and negotiated nature of learners' affective engagements with English. Guided by a reflective, arts-based analytic process, three interrelated themes emerged from the integrated analysis, as discussed below.

English as an Emotional Relationship

Both poems and interview data indicate that participants relate to English not merely as a subject, but as something emotionally meaningful in their lives (Pavlenko, 2013). In Figure 1, Gine writes, "Me and English like are music", comparing English to music and a bird flying freely. These metaphors suggest intimacy, familiarity and a desire for freedom. Rather than framing English as a classroom requirement, Gine portrays it as a companion, a melody, and a dream of freedom. Her poem reveals a position between affection for the language and fear of inadequacy, with effort functioning as the bridge between these two emotional states. The tension between feeling fluent and being linguistically limited is exactly the kind of human, emotional truth poetic inquiry is designed to honor.

Figure 1. Gine's Poem

Although the line "Me and English like are music" contains grammatical inaccuracy, poetic inquiry treats such forms as authentic traces of the learner's current linguistic reality. Similarly, the line "Even sentence is still difficult for me compile" exposes vulnerability and self-awareness. These "errors" are not merely deficits; they are evidence of the learner's honest positioning within her language journey. The poem shifts the analytical focus from evaluating proficiency to understanding experience—from "How well can students use English?" to "How do they feel, struggle, and dream in relation to English?". This emotional attachment is further clarified in Gine's interview:

Excerpt 1
Gine: "I love listening to English songs, when I listen to the songs; it feels like I feel close to the language. Especially for some popular songs that repeated again and again everywhere. Even if I don't understand all the words, it feels like English is already part of my everyday life." (Interview Transcript)

It can be seen from excerpt 1 that English is embedded in daily experience through music. Emotional closeness precedes full comprehension, suggesting that connection to language is not dependent on mastery. English becomes part of her symbolic and affective world. A similar emotional dynamic appears in Zaly's reflection in excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2
Zaly: "Sometimes I feel empty because I cannot speak any word in English, but I know the word and its meaning. It was frustrating. However, when I understand something new in English, it feels refreshing, like something new enters my mind." (Interview Transcript)

Zaly's statement in excerpt 2 resonates with Kramsch's (2009) notion of symbolic meaning-making, where language is not merely a communicative tool, but a site of personal significance shaped by emotions and lived experience. Zaly's description of "emptiness" and "refreshing" illustrates how engagement with English is experienced affectively, confirming the view that language learning involves symbolic and emotional dimensions rather than purely cognitive processes. Importantly, the data also extends Kramsch's (2009) argument by revealing how symbolic meaning-making operates even under conditions of perceived linguistic inadequacy. Despite limited speaking ability, English retains emotional and experiential value for the learner, suggesting that symbolic engagement with language does not depend solely on proficiency. At the same time, the excerpt complicates a purely positive interpretation of symbolic meaning-making. The learner's sense of connection coexists with frustration and emotional tension, indicating that symbolic relationships with language are not inherently empowering but may involve ambivalence, vulnerability, and oscillation between absence and discovery. Viewed through this lens, the learner's narrative contributes to understanding the "shared space" not simply as a site of meaning-making, but as an affectively charged arena where attachment, struggle, and self-perception are continuously negotiated. Zaly does not reject English because it is difficult. Instead, difficulty intensifies emotional investment. Her struggle is not framed as failure, but as part of a meaningful journey. This reflects an emotional resilience narrative (see Figure 2). In her poem, Zaly expressed loneliness, anticipation, overwhelm, and hope. The line in her poem "I sit alone with the shadow of the night" share the feeling of learning English feels solitary. This positions language learning as an internal, personal journey, not just classroom activity. The learner is emotionally alone, even if socially surrounded. This expression can be interpreted that the experience of learning English is a personal journey. Each participant has their own unique experiences as part of their journey in learning.

Unlike the first poem in Figure 1 (where hope comes from effort), In Figure 2 hope not only comes from hard work but also reflects resilience grounded in belief. The last two lines in

Zaly's poem are less about agency through effort and more about endurance through emotional cycles. This poem presents English not as a skill to conquer, but as a climate to live through sometimes dark, sometimes overwhelming, but always carrying the promise of renewal. The participant frames her journey as cyclical, emotional, and hopeful, showing that persistence in language learning is often sustained by belief in future brightness, not immediate success. These metaphorical constructions show that English functions as an emotional presence, not merely a school subject. The poems collectively demonstrate that learners relate to English through affection, longing, and personal meaning, suggesting that emotional engagement is central to their learning experience.
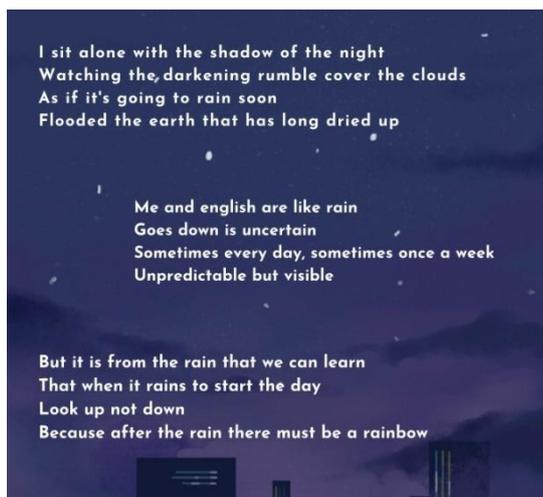

Figure 2. Zaly's Poem

The first stanza of the poem in Figure 2 vividly captures Zaly's experience and illustrates how she feels about learning English. This experience aligns with foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), where fear of negative evaluation inhibits performance. However, poetic inquiry reveals how anxiety is not merely cognitive but deeply embodied and relational. The classroom becomes an affective space where vulnerability is intensified (Benesch, 2012; Harklau, 2017). The findings suggest that the nuanced interplay of positive and negative emotions fostered greater student awareness of their English learning journeys while also intensifying the personal meaning they attached to those experiences. In this context, the coexistence of uplifting and challenging emotions heightened students' engagement and motivation in language learning to facilitate students' psychological resilience (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024; Pan, 2022; Pourgharib & Shakki, 2024).

Taken together, the poems and interviews demonstrate that English functions as an emotional presence in students' lives. Students relate to it through attachment, longing, struggle, and hope. Emotional engagement is therefore not peripheral but central to their language learning experience.

Living with Struggle and Hope

A second theme emerging from the data is the persistent tension between difficulty and hope. Across the poems and interviews, students openly acknowledge their struggles with English while simultaneously expressing determination to continue learning. Rather than presenting difficulty as failure, they frame it as part of an ongoing journey sustained by belief and effort. In Figure 3, Ryan uses the metaphor "Like the moon that I can't reach" and "I can't find the way." These images convey distance, uncertainty, and a sense of being lost. English is constructed as something far away—visible yet seemingly unattainable. However, the poem does not end in resignation. The closing lines shift toward resolve, signaling a commitment to keep trying despite obstacles.
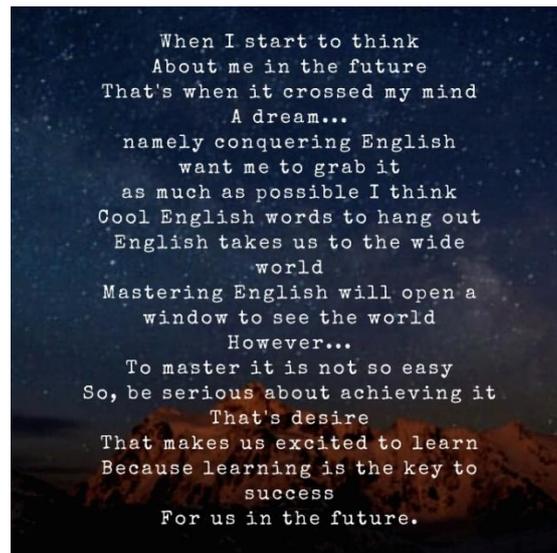
When I start to think
About me in the future
That's when it crossed my mind
A dream...
namely conquering English
want me to grab it
as much as possible I think
Cool English words to hang out
English takes us to the wide
world
Mastering English will open a
window to see the world
However...
To master it is not so easy
So, be serious about achieving it
That's desire
That makes us excited to learn
Because learning is the key to
success
For us in the future.

Figure 3. Rayn's Poem

Ryan's interview in excerpt 3 further clarifies this emotional positioning:

Excerpt 3
Ryan: "Sometimes I feel English is a language of different planet for me. Yes, I learn English before in my school, but I remember nothing about it. English is not something familiar for my daily life. My friends can read English better than me, and I feel left behind. But I still believe if I keep learning slowly, I can improve." (Interview Transcript)

Here, English is described as alien and unfamiliar, reinforcing the metaphor of distance. Feelings of comparison and inadequacy intensify the struggle. Yet the statement "I still believe" introduces hope as a counterforce to discouragement. Persistence is framed not as immediate success but as gradual improvement. The learner's narrative therefore reveals resilience grounded in belief rather than proficiency.

A similar pattern appears in Gine's poem (Figure 1), where the admission "I don't know many words," followed by, "The only key is my effort." In the interview, Gine was always excited and participated actively in the classroom activities. Students who experience enjoyment during the learning process find motivation and meanings that trigger and foster positive emotions. In her interview she clarified: "I often feel insecure when speaking English, but I tell myself that effort is more important than being perfect." This emotional duality reflects Benesch's (2012) argument that language learning involves emotional labor. Learners must negotiate frustration, embarrassment, and uncertainty while maintaining hope. The poems make this tension visible through metaphor, while interviews confirm that these feelings are part of learners lived realities. The shared space becomes a space where struggle is normalized and hope is collectively sustained.

The poems create an open space for students to express their voices (confusion, insecurity, and limitation of proficiency). At the same time, these admissions are consistently paired with hope of the future. Such as the last line of Zaly's poem in Figure 2 "… rain leading to a rainbow," indicates the participant effort as the key, belief in eventual success. This combination creates a shared narrative of vulnerable persistence. All of the participants shared the same feeling in different expressions. Poetic inquiry makes space for students to articulate feelings that might remain hidden in conventional classroom discourse. Their voices reveal that emotional struggle is not an individual weakness but a common dimension of the EFL experience. The poetic artifacts in this study allow these feelings to coexist with hope, belief, and determination. This supports Hanauer's (2012) argument that poetry writing in second

language contexts enables learners to articulate personally meaningful experiences that are often silenced in traditional academic discourse.

Imagining Possible Selves

The third theme connects English learning to students' imagined futures and identity aspirations (Norton, 2013). Both poems and interviews reveal that students invest emotionally in English because of who they hope to become. In line 5, 11, and 12 Figure 3, English is described as something to "conquer" that will "open a window to see the world." The way she describes her feeling can be seen as future possible self (Rofiah et al., 2024). Ryan's interview further reinforces this orientation toward imagined futures as can be seen in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4
Ryan: "I want to work in a place where I can meet people from other countries. I don't know what it is. Kind of international work environment connected with many people around the world. English is important for my future career, so even if it's hard, I have to keep learning."

Here, persistence is explicitly linked to future professional identity. Difficulty does not diminish motivation; rather, it strengthens commitment because English is perceived as essential for participation in a global environment. The learner's present struggle is sustained by a projected future self who is competent and internationally connected.

A similar aspiration appears in Figure 1, the image of a bird flying freely reflects a desire for expansion. English is conceptualized as mobility, limitlessness, and escape from restriction. Language is interpreted as liberation, not just communication. It suggests English may be associated with global access or broader life opportunities. Another participant, Windy, noted in the interview, "If I can speak English well, I feel I can go anywhere and not be afraid." In Figure 4, Windy describes English as a distant moon, connects it to future hope, "Maybe now I cannot reach it, but in the future, I want to be someone who is confident using English." The moon becomes a metaphor for enduring aspiration. Unlike the earlier theme of struggle and hope grounded in effort, this imagery emphasizes belief in long-term growth. English is imagined as a future state of being rather than merely a skill to acquire.

ME AND ENGLISH
LIKE THE MOON THAT I CAN'T REACH
I'D LIKE TO EXPLORE
BUT, SOMEHOW I CAN'T FIND THE WAY
SO,
I BELIEVE....
IN EVERY SECOND
OF THIS WITH ME FIX YOUR RESOLVE
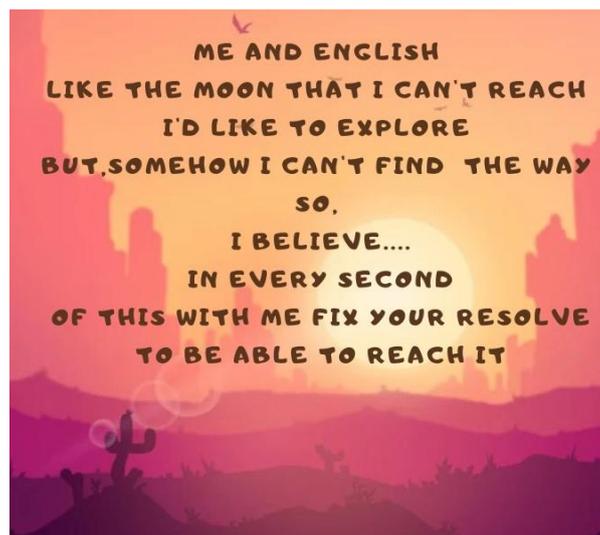TO BE ABLE TO REACH IT

Figure 4. Windy's Poem

These accounts show how English is tied to imagined identities confident speakers, global participants, successful professionals. As Norton (2013) suggests, learners' motivation is inseparable from their visions of possible futures. The shared emotional space thus extends

beyond present feelings into collectively imagined tomorrows. This reflects the L2 Motivational Self System, particularly the Ideal L2 Self, where future-oriented images drive persistence (Dörnyei, 2009). English is not just a subject but a symbolic resource for social mobility and identity transformation (Norton, 2013; Pavlenko, 2013).

Across the three themes, emotions function as the connective tissue of language learning. Anxiety, joy, and aspiration are not separate stages but coexisting forces shaping how students engage with English. The poetic artifacts, combined with interviews, transform these emotions from private experiences into shared, relational knowledge (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Richardson, 1994). By poeticizing students' voices, the study enacts what Chamcharatsri (2013) and Hanauer (2010) describe as the expressive potential of L2 and multilingual writing, where emotion becomes communicable, not just reportable. In doing so, the research opens a space where readers are invited to feel with learners, their trembling, their small victories, their imagined futures. This shared space is not only methodological but ethical. It honors learners as emotional, agentive subjects whose language journeys are lived through the body, imagination, and heart (Benesch, 2012; Harklau, 2017). Poetic inquiry, therefore, does not merely represent experience. It repositions emotion as knowledge in EFL learning.

All students' poems orient strongly toward the future, aligning with Norton's (2013) concept of investment and imagined identities. Learners associate English with who they might become rather than only who they currently are. In Figure 3, English is explicitly linked to future success and global mobility, "English takes us to the wide world" and "Learning is the key to success." Similarly, Figure 1 uses the image of a bird flying freely, symbolizing personal expansion, while Figure 2 suggests renewal through rain after drought. In Figure 4, the moon represents a distant but persistent dream. These images illustrate how learners invest emotionally in English because of its connection to imagined future selves. As Norton (2013) argues, motivation in language learning is inseparable from identity, learners engage with the language as a pathway to new forms of belonging, opportunity, and selfhood.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate how Indonesian EFL students experience, interpret, and express their emotions in learning English through poetic inquiry. The analysis aimed to explore how students construct meaning around English beyond conventional cognitive or skill-based frameworks, and how poetic expression can provide access to the affective and imaginative dimensions of language learning. By foregrounding students' poetic artifacts alongside interview narratives, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how emotions shape learners' engagement with English and their evolving sense of self. The findings contribute to literature in several important ways. Empirically, the study highlights the centrality of emotional and imaginative experience in EFL learning, demonstrating that learners' relationships with English are structured not only by proficiency or classroom performance but also by feelings of desire, frustration, hope, and attachment. Theoretically, the findings extend perspectives on language learning emotions by showing how affective experiences are symbolically constructed through metaphor and imagery, positioning language as an emotionally meaningful presence rather than merely an academic object. Methodologically, the study illustrates the value of poetic inquiry as both a representational and interpretive practice, offering an alternative to conventional analytic approaches that often-abstract learners' voices into categorical descriptions. The poetic artifacts created by Indonesian EFL students reveal English learning as an experience lived not only in the mind but deeply within students' emotional and imaginative worlds. Rather than centering on grammar, tests, or classroom routines, the poems construct English as something felt, desired, struggled with, and hoped for. Through metaphor, imagery, and aesthetic expression, students collectively open a shared emotional space where vulnerability and aspiration coexist. Across the poems, English emerges as an emotional companion. Students describe their relationship with the

language through images of music, rain, birds, the moon, and conquest. Such metaphors position English not as a distant academic subject but as something intertwined with their inner lives.

Taken together, the poems form a collective emotional landscape. While each learner's imagery is unique, their experiences resonate with one another: English is difficult but meaningful; progress is slow but possible; struggle is personal but not isolating; hope is fragile yet persistent. This resonance constitutes the shared emotional space at the heart of the study. It is a space where learners' voices meet through common feelings of longing, effort, uncertainty, and aspiration. By engaging with learners' poetic representations, this study shows that language learning is not only a process of acquiring skills, but a deeply human journey of becoming. Poetic inquiry makes visible the affective and identity-related dimensions of this journey, inviting educators and researchers to recognize emotion not as peripheral, but as central to how learners live and make sense of their experiences with English.

There are some limitations of this study. First, involving in a relatively small group of Indonesian university EFL students, the findings are context-specific. Emotional experiences of language learning are shaped by sociocultural, institutional, and individual factors. Thus, the emotional space described in this study should not be generalized. Second, the use of poetry as both data and analysis foregrounds emotional and metaphorical expression, which may privilege students who feel comfortable with creative writing. Some learners may express emotions more easily through other modes such as visual art, music, or digital storytelling. Future research could explore multimodal poetic inquiry to include a broader range of expressive forms. Third, the interpretation of poetic texts is inevitably shaped by the researchers' own positionality, experiences, and theoretical lenses. While interviews were used to ground interpretations, poetic inquiry does not aim for a single fixed meaning. Instead, it embraces layered and open-ended understanding. Future studies could incorporate participant co-interpretation to further deepen collaborative meaning-making. Future research might also explore longitudinal emotional trajectories, examining how learners' emotional relationships with English evolve over time. Additionally, studies could investigate how poetic or arts-based approaches influence classroom climate, motivation, or willingness to communicate. Comparative research across different cultural or educational contexts would further illuminate how shared emotional spaces are shaped by local conditions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT