

A Narrative Inquiry of EFL Private Tutor's Experiences In Lowering Students' Affective Filter

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the experiences of a private English teacher in lowering students' affective filters in a private tutoring setting. Using a narrative inquiry approach, this study involved one private English teacher in Ngawi Regency, East Java, who has been teaching for more than three years and frequently works with students who experience anxiety about speaking in formal classroom settings. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in three sessions via Zoom and supported by artifacts such as teacher-student conversations, brief evaluations, and affective messages indicating relational closeness. The research findings reveal five main themes: the journey to becoming a private tutor and the formation of professional identity; recognizing students' anxiety through silence and hesitation; creating a safe space through humor, validation, and non-judgment; the tutor's role as a mediator between students, parents, and academic demands; and the students' transformation from fear to greater self-confidence. These findings confirm that private teachers serve not only as material deliverers but also as emotional companions who help students feel safe, valued, and empowered to engage in English language learning.

Keywords: Narrative Inquiry, Private Tutor, Affective Filter, English Language Learning.

A. INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language in the current era is not simply a matter of mastering grammar, vocabulary, and practicing language skills, but second language acquisition is also greatly influenced by factors beyond technical factors, including affective factors such as anxiety, a sense of security, and self-confidence. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety in foreign language acquisition is a unique construct, not just general anxiety, and often arises when students have to speak, take tests, or be evaluated in class. A meta-analysis by Botes, et al (2020) also showed a moderate negative relationship between FLCA and academic achievement in foreign languages. In the Indonesia setting, Djafri & Wibarti (2018) demonstrated that students' perceptions of teacher behavior are significantly related to foreign language anxiety, indicating that pedagogical dimensions need to be taken seriously into account.

To interpret this phenomenon, the most relevant theory that frequently arises when discussing students' affective aspects is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1985) explains that when a student's affective filter is high, for example due to anxiety, a negative attitude, or a psychologically defensive state, the language input that is actually available will not enter the language acquisition system optimally. Instead, a classroom environment that reduces anxiety and makes students feel safe will be more conducive to second language acquisition. In other words, effective language instruction not only provides comprehensible input but also creates a safe emotional environment for learners.

Aside from anxiety, motivation and self-confidence are often important components of the affective dimension in language learning. Noels et al. (2000) demonstrate that motivation for language learning can be understood through the framework of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and emphasize that affective variables such as attitude, orientation, anxiety, and motivation are just as important as aptitude in predicting success in L2 learning. This is relevant to the context of private tutoring, as students who come to a private tutor often need not only an explanation of the material but also emotional encouragement to give things a try and not be afraid of making mistakes, which they might not receive in a formal classroom setting.

In this situation, the role of the private tutor becomes crucial. Recent research by An et al. (2024) on the teacher-student relationship shows that a positive teacher-student relationship influences learners' engagement and self-efficacy, and that teachers need to demonstrate empathy, treat students fairly, offer praise, and encourage them. Noddings (2013) also places relationships and care at the core of education; according to her view, teaching is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but rather a relationship that fosters a sense of security and genuine concern for students' needs. For private EFL teachers, this framework is important because one-on-one or small-group interactions can provide greater opportunities to build the kind of emotional closeness that is difficult to establish in large classes (Noddings, 2015).

Private education is often understood as part of the “shadow education” phenomenon. Bray (2007) explains that private tutoring is a form of paid supplementary instruction that takes place outside of formal schools, typically after school hours, on weekends, or during school breaks. Because of its more flexible and individualized nature, the private setting has the potential to serve as a “safe” space for students experiencing high levels of stress in formal schools. In this kind of setting, teachers’ affective strategies become crucial for reducing anxiety and building students’ confidence in using the language (Liu & Li, 2023).

Based on this background, this study is particularly important because much of the existing literature focuses on anxiety related to learning a foreign language in formal classroom settings, while the role of private tutors as affective mediators has rarely been explored in depth. In fact, private teachers not only teach language but also often serve as emotional companions who help students reduce their fear, insecurity, and shyness.

Existing literature consistently suggests that affective variables play a central role in second language learning. Beyond Krashen’s (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, Horwitz et al. (1986) argue that foreign language anxiety constitutes a distinct psychological construct specific to language learning rather than general anxiety. Furthermore, Piniel and Csizér (2013) demonstrate that motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy operate as interconnected dimensions, while Shang and Ma (2024) report that classroom anxiety negatively predicts English achievement whereas self-efficacy and learning motivation positively contribute to language proficiency. Collectively, these studies indicate that language learning success depends not only on instructional quality but also on learners’ emotional experiences.

Previous studies have also emphasized the importance of teacher support in shaping learners’ affective experiences. Dewaele et al. (2019) reported that learners’ perceptions of teacher characteristics are closely associated with foreign language enjoyment and anxiety. Similarly, Liu and Li (2023) identified academic, instrumental, and emotional support as the three major dimensions of EFL teacher support, while An et al. (2024) found that positive teacher–student relationships improve language learning through enhanced self-efficacy. These findings suggest that teachers’ emotional support is as important as instructional competence in facilitating language learning.

Within the context of private tutoring, commonly referred to as shadow education, previous studies have shown that this learning environment differs substantially from formal schooling. Bray (2007) describes private tutoring as supplementary education that provides individualized learning opportunities beyond school hours. Yung and Chiu (2020) further found that students generally report positive experiences in English private tutoring because of the closer teacher–student relationship. Likewise, Yung (2020, 2024) illustrates that private tutoring creates unique learning ecologies characterized by learner autonomy, motivation, and social investment.

Despite these growing studies, relatively little attention has been paid to the lived experiences of private EFL tutors themselves, particularly regarding how they recognize students’ affective barriers and intentionally lower affective filters during everyday teaching. Existing studies have primarily examined learners’ anxiety, teacher support, or private tutoring separately, whereas narrative accounts of tutors’ emotional practices remain limited (Hua & Yung, 2024; Liu & Li, 2023). Consequently, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of an EFL private tutor in creating emotionally supportive learning environments that reduce students’ affective filters.

The research question of this study are:

1. How does the tutor experience and interpret students’ affective barriers?
2. What strategies does the tutor use to lower affective filter?
3. How do relational and contextual features shape the tutor’s efforts?

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Affective Filter & Foreign Language Anxiety

A discussion regarding this topic must begin with the idea that foreign language learning is never entirely cognitive, as affective factors also determine whether language input can be processed optimally. Krashen (1985) emphasized that a high affective filter, characterized by anxiety, weak motivation, and low self-confidence, can obstruct language acquisition. Meanwhile, Horwitz et al. (1986) demonstrated that foreign language anxiety is a distinct form of anxiety specific to foreign language learning. In line with this, Piniel & Csizér (2013) showed that motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy are interconnected in a dynamic system, rather than being independent variables. Recent findings by Shang & Ma (2024) also indicate that classroom anxiety reduces self-efficacy and English proficiency, whereas motivation and self-efficacy actually enhance proficiency. Therefore, research on private tutors becomes relevant because a private setting is highly likely to be a place where these affective filters are directly reduced through personal interaction.

Teacher Support

Furthermore, the association between teacher behavior and learning emotions is also strongly supported in the existing literature. Dewaele et al. (2019) found a negative relationship between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety, and demonstrated that students' perceptions of their teachers' personalities are related to their levels of enjoyment and anxiety. Liu & Li (2023) further clarified that EFL teacher support has three main dimensions: academic, instrumental, and emotional support, emphasizing that teacher support is not only material but also involves a sense of security and emotional closeness. Related to intrapersonal relationships, An et al. (2024) demonstrated that the teacher-student relationship has a positive effect on language learning, and that self-efficacy serves as a key mediator between the teacher-student relationship and learning outcomes. This series of studies supports the assumption that private tutors hold a highly strategic position because, in a one-on-one setting, emotional support, praise, empathy, and adjustments to the pace of learning can be provided more intensively than in large classes.

Private Tutoring

In the field of private tutoring, which is also known as "shadow education," it has long been understood as supplementary learning outside of formal schooling that has spread widely across the globe. Bray (2007) notes that shadow education often takes place after school hours, on weekends, or during vacations, and can have a positive impact by helping students keep up with the curriculum, although it can also increase academic pressure and social inequality. In a study conducted by Yung & Chiu (2020), the majority of high school seniors in Hong Kong reported enjoying English private tutoring, and family factors, reasons for participating in tutoring, tutors, and student attributes were associated with that positive experience. Another narrative study by Yung (2020) on low-income students also showed that EPT is understood as a social investment for social mobility, while Yung's (2024) study demonstrated that the learning experience in online tutoring demands complex student autonomy. All of this suggests that the private tutoring setting is not merely an "extra class," but a distinct learning ecology, with relationships, motivations, and pressures that differ from those in formal schools.

Despite the fact that research on anxiety, enjoyment, teacher support, and shadow education has expanded, there remains a clear gap regarding the lived experiences of private teachers themselves. Liu & Li (2023) explicitly state that research on EFL teacher support is still in its early stages and that its internal structure has not yet been explored in depth. Hua & Yung (2024) point out that narrative studies on EFL tutors have indeed begun to emerge, but their focus is primarily on tutors' career trajectories rather than on their affective experiences in calming students, which are discussed narratively. From this perspective, this study aims to highlight the real-life experiences of an EFL private tutor in interpreting, responding to, and reducing students' affective filters.

C. METHOD

Research Design and Sample

This study employs a narrative inquiry design because its primary objective is to understand lived experiences through the stories told by the participants. Clandinin and Connelly view narrative inquiry as an approach to investigating human experiences through stories, field texts, and the relationships built during the research process, with a focus on three main dimensions: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, this design was chosen because the private tutor's experience in dealing with students who are anxious about speaking is best understood as a narrative that unfolds over time, rather than merely a collection of brief responses. Inferentially, the use of a single participant is also consistent with the logic of narrative inquiry, which emphasizes the depth of the story and the meaning of the experience rather than the statistical broadness of the sample (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The participant in this study was selected using purposive sampling, which selected the most information-rich case and the one most relevant to the research focus (Patton, 2022). In this study, the participant was a private tutor in Ngawi Regency, East Java, who had been teaching privately for at least three years and frequently encountered students who experienced difficulties or anxiety speaking in formal classroom settings. The selection of a single participant is not a weakness in this design, as narrative inquiry is indeed oriented toward a deep understanding of a specific individual's experiences within a particular context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2022).

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted without disrupting the participants' teaching activities, using two main instruments. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Zoom Meeting in three one-hour sessions. Narrative interviewing is the primary data source in narrative inquiry, and in-depth interviews allow researchers to trace the flow of experiences naturally and provide space for participants

to narrate events chronologically and reflectively (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Wa-Mbaleka & Rosario, 2022). The first session focused on the teachers' backgrounds, the second on narratives of students' emotional challenges, and the third on coping strategies or solutions. Second, this study also utilized artifacts such as students' evaluation chats between tutor and students regarding their affective comfort, as documents and artifacts can enrich narratives and help interpret the social meaning of the experiences being narrated (Salmons, 2023; Yamagata-Lynch et al., 2017).

Ethical considerations are an important part of the entire research process. Participants will be provided with an explanation of the research objectives, procedures, potential risks, and their right to voluntarily accept or decline participation through informed consent. The principle of confidentiality is maintained by removing personally identifiable information, such as institutional names, student identities, or personal account details, from transcripts and artifacts; instead, pseudonyms such as "the participant" or "the teacher" are used in the reporting of results. All files are stored in a secure folder and are accessible only to the researcher. To enhance reliability and transparency, the researcher also maintains an audit trail consisting of coding records and theme development, as this documentation supports the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Given, 2008; Kaiser, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a combination of restorying and thematic analysis. All interview recordings will be transcribed verbatim and then restructured into a coherent narrative. Nasheeda et al. (2019) explain that restorying in narrative analysis can begin with interview transcripts, followed by the chronological ordering of events so that participants' stories emerge as complete and meaningful narratives. Afterward, the data were analyzed through a three-dimensional narrative space that emphasizes temporality (the past, the present, and future hopes), sociality (teacher-student relationships), and place (private spaces as learning contexts) (Kridel, 2010). The next stage is thematic coding, which involves grouping narratives into themes that represent the reduction of affective filter components, particularly anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation. This approach aligns with Braun and Clarke's view that thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, organizing, and reporting themes in qualitative data, while also allowing for the development of transparent and trustworthy procedures (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents research findings organized into five themes that emerged from the narrative of the participant, a private English teacher at a tutoring center. The analysis follows the narrative inquiry approach, which places the teacher's experience at the center of the analysis, using direct quotes as the primary data.

Theme 1: Becoming a Private Tutor and Developing Professional Identity

The participants' journey toward becoming private tutors was not a linear process, but rather took shape through a series of interrelated structural, economic, and personal experiences. Within the framework of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), professional identity is not static, but is continually constructed through life experiences and social interactions.

The participant explained that she decided to pursue a private education path because of structural barriers within Indonesia's formal education system:

(B/T1/K1)

"saya waktu itu lulusan di tahun 2024. Saya fresh graduate. Nah, di situ karena saya lulusannya sarjana pendidikan otomatis kalau kita mau terjun di lapangan yang di sekolah kita harus ikut PPG."

This quote shows that bureaucratic obstacles, specifically the requirement to complete the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program before teaching in formal schools, served as the initial motivation for participants to choose an alternative path. In addition, her experience teaching private lessons, which began during her study period, provided significant pedagogical expertise:

(B/T1/K2)

"saya sebelum terjun di dunia private, saya memang dari berkuliah saya memang sudah menjadi guru private yang door-to-door. Jadi, ke rumah-rumah siswa untuk menjadi guru les mereka. Nah, dari situ saya kan otomatis sudah mempunyai pengalaman kurang lebih 3,5 sampai 4 tahun untuk menjadi guru private."

The door-to-door experience spanning 3.5 to 4 years shows that the participant's professional identity as a private tutor had actually been formed long before he officially joined the tutoring institution. This is consistent with the concept of professional identity formation proposed by Connelly and Clandinin (1999), in which past experiences shape the way a teacher understands his role and responsibilities.

Furthermore, participants explicitly reflected on the differences in responsibilities between formal school teachers and private tutors:

(B/T1/K5)

"kenapa saya merasa tanggung jawab untuk menjadi guru less itu lebih besar daripada guru yang ada di sekolah biasa karena kita kami dianggap lebih harus bisa membuat siswa lebih paham dengan mata pelajaran yang sudah diajarkan di sekolah tapi mereka tidak paham jadi mereka itu memilih bimbingan belajar karena mereka merasa yang ada di sekolah itu kurang"

This awareness of greater responsibility strengthens the participants' identity formation as teachers focused on a holistic understanding of their students. This is emphasized by a concrete experience that served as a turning point in her teaching journey:

(B/T1/K6)

"kak aku selama ini baru paham ini ketika kakak yang mengajar, aku selama ini sekolah tidak pernah paham di ajar guruku tentang ini"

The student's statement represented an epiphany for the participant, a turning point that, in the context of narrative inquiry, is referred to as a critical incident (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This moment strengthened the participant's commitment to the quality of teaching and marked the development of his professional identity as a student-centered educator.

This theme is further reinforced by conversational artifacts that show that a private tutor's identity is built not only on structural and professional experiences, but also on emotional recognition from students. In Artifact 1 and Artifact 2, students express very personal appreciation, such as *"aku juga senang banget bisa kenal dan belajar sama mbak"* dan *"mb terimakasih yaaaa, udah sabar ngajarin aku,"* which indicates that teacher is seen not merely as instructors, but as close and meaningful figures. Artifact 3 further strengthens this point through the statement *"terimakasih udah selalu gercep kalau diajakin tambahan,"* which shows that teachers are perceived as responsive and reliable figures. Within the framework of Connelly and Clandinin (1999, 2000), a teacher's professional identity is indeed shaped through relationships and experiences that are constantly nurtured in daily interactions; therefore, the students' affective responses in this artifact can be interpreted as a sign that the private tutor's identity has been socially recognized as an educator who is present, caring, and relevant to the students' learning journey. This is also consistent with the findings of Yung and Chiu (2020) that learning experiences in private tutoring are heavily influenced by the teacher and the learning relationships formed within that setting.

Theme 2: Recognizing Students' Anxiety Through Silence and Hesitation

The second theme describes the participants' sensitivity in recognizing signs of anxiety and reluctance among students in the classroom. In the language learning literature, foreign language anxiety is one of the most significant affective barriers (Horwitz et al., 1986). The participant demonstrated sharp observational skills in recognizing these manifestations of anxiety.

One of the most common signs of anxiety that participants observed was collective silence and the behavior of waiting for a classmate's response:

(B/T2/K1)

"mereka memilih untuk diam, kalau nggak saling melihat satu sama lain, karena merasa kok temenku belum ada yang jawab ya kok temenku, ini belum jawab nanti kalau temenku ada yang jawab, nanti aku baru ikut jawab"

This social referencing behavior, which is waiting for others' responses before responding, reflects a form of social anxiety. Students do not necessarily have no idea what the answer is; rather, they are afraid of making a mistake in front of their classmates. Participant also identified collective silence as another signal:

(B/T2/K2)

"mereka juga diam seribu bahasa mereka mengheningkan cipta bersama-sama nah itu karena mereka merasa jawaban mereka itu tidak yakin, ataupun mereka memang sudah memiliki jawaban namun memang takut untuk mengungkapkannya"

The difference between "not knowing" and "knowing but being afraid to express it" is a crucial distinction. The participant is able to distinguish between the two, demonstrating a high level of pedagogical diagnostic ability. In the context of student facing "UTBK" anxiety, the participant describes a deeper affective dimension:

(B/T2/K5)

"kak, aku bisa gak ya? kak, aku bisa gak ya? kak, aku gak yakin ya kak kak, kalau bisa kak, aku kok ini agak takut ya jadi mereka itu udah overthinking duluan kak sebelum menghadapi UTBK tersebut"

The overthinking patterns described by the participants are in line with the concept of debilitating anxiety that hinders academic performance (Alpert & Haber, 1960). Participants also recognized individual variations in anxiety expressions:

(B/T2/K6)

"siswa itu memang juga ada kak, karakternya yang dia itu selalu silent, nggak selalu diam dan dia itu nggak menjawab gitu. Bukan yang menjawab in the class ya. Kalau yang secara general, dia pasti kemungkinan itu tidak menjawab."

The participant's ability to distinguish silence as situational anxiety and silence as an individual character shows a reflective and non-generalizing approach to understanding students. This is one of the characteristics of teachers who have emotional intelligence competencies in teaching (Goleman, 1995).

The findings are reinforced by artifacts providing more concrete evidence that students' anxiety does indeed manifest itself in a tangible form, not just a teacher's interpretation. In **Artifact 4**, students send a photo waiting for the exam while sending a message *"sedikit gemetar,"* Then the teacher responded with prayer and reinforcement that the students had *"mengusahakan yg terbaik selama ini."* In Artifact 5, the student confesses that the teacher helps when he or she *"mulai overthinking sama SNBT,"* which confirms that anxiety does not only arise when speaking in class, but also in high-risk evaluative situations. This evidence supports the interview findings that silence, hesitation, and overthinking are tangible expressions of an affective barrier. Theoretically, this situation aligns with Horwitz et al. (1986) on foreign language anxiety and with Krashen (1985), who explains that a high affective filter hinders the intake of language input. Furthermore, the teacher's reinforcement evident in this artifact is also consistent with the findings of Piniel and Csizér (2013) and Shang and Ma (2024) that anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy are dynamically interrelated. In other words, this artifact not only indicates that students are anxious but also demonstrates how that anxiety manifests as an emotion requiring interpersonal regulation.

Theme 3: Creating a Safe Space Through Humor, Validation, and Non-Judgment

The third theme is at the core of the participant's pedagogical practice, how he or she actively builds an affectively safe learning space. The concept of affective filter (Krashen, 1982) emphasizes that language learning is optimal when emotional barriers are minimized. Participant strategies include three main elements: humor, validation, and non-judgment.

Humor is the first tool for easing tension in the classroom:

(B/T3/K2)

"Ketika saya tanya jawabannya apa? A, B, C, D, Angkel Mutu. Nah, A, B, C, D, Angkel Mutu. Nah, dari situ mereka langsung ketawa. Terus kayak ketawa, dari situ mereka merasa kayak, oh ini tuh nggak kelas yang harus serius banget loh."

This use of non-trivial humor serves as a tool for anxiety decompression. In research on language classes, humor has been shown to be effective in lowering communicative anxiety and increasing student participation (Shiyab, 2009). Other examples of specific use of humor:

(B/T3/K3)

"C, Cinca. Nah, terus gitu. Nah, langsung ketawa, C, Cinca. Kayak gitu. Kalau enggak, ternyata baru nanti jawab, enggak Kak, C itu untuk cimol."

The interesting thing is that the students' response to the humor actually sparked genuine verbal participation. Students who were initially reluctant to speak eventually responded, despite it being in a joking way, and this became the gateway to more substantive academic participation.

Validation strategy is a crucial second element. Participants consistently avoided the word *"salah"* and replaced it with more affirmative phrases:

(B/T3/K8)

"saya bilang kurang tepat coba diingat-ingat kembali apa ya kira-kira nah dari situ kak mereka itu akan merasa tidak tertekan atau merasa tidak cemas dengan apa ya yang ingin kalian apa yang akan mereka lontarkan itu mereka tidak akan dihakimin karena mereka tahu bahwa oh walaupun aku jawab salah, aku enggak disalahkan"

The choice of the word *"kurang tepat"* instead of *"salah"* reflects the principle of growth mindset pedagogy (Dweck, 2006), where mistakes are treated as part of the learning process, not failure. The third element, non-judgmental attitude, was expressed by participants as the foundation of trust relations:

(B/T3/K9)

"Biar dekat nih. Biar mereka kalau ngobrol apapun, mereka tidak merasa dijudge. Nah, siswa juga akan merasa nyaman, merasa aman dengan kita karena mereka itu setiap ngobrol ataupun setiap bercerita sesuatu, kita itu tidak akan menghakimi mereka."

These three elements together form what in the literature is referred to as a psychologically safe classroom (Edmondson, 1999), an environment where students feel safe enough to take academic risks without fear of being humiliated or punished.

Through the artifacts, it is also very clear that the safe space built by teachers does not stop at the classroom strategy, but also lives in daily communication with students. In Artifact 1 and Artifact 2, the teacher-student relationship is colored by warm expressions such as *"love u too mba bungaaa," "jangan sedihh ihh kak,"* and *"pasti nanti sedih banget jarang ketemu sama kak flow,"* which indicates a sense of comfort, security, and strong emotional attachment. Artifact 5 emphasizes the role of the teacher as an emotional companion when students are "overthinking", while Artifact 6 shows that even in administrative moments such as school enrollment, the teacher is still present with prayer and encouragement, not distance. This data reinforces the interview narrative that teachers deliberately reject a culture of judgment and replace it with validation, humor, and closeness. Theoretically, this pattern is in line with Krashen (1985) on the reduction of affective filters, Dewaele et al. (2019) on the relationship between enjoyment and anxiety, and Liu and Li (2023) on the importance of emotional support. On the other hand, the practice of teachers not to embarrass students and replace the word "wrong" with "inappropriate" is also in line with the principle of growth mindset from Dweck (2006) and the idea of psychological safety from Edmondson (1999). Thus, these artifacts reinforce that private spaces are truly affectively safe spaces, not just smaller learning spaces.

Theme 4: Mediation Between Students, Parents, and Academic Expectations

The fourth theme reveals an often invisible but crucial dimension of role in private teacher practice: the position as a mediator between students, parents, and academic expectations. Within the framework of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), teachers operate not only in the context of the classroom, but also in the broader family system.

Participants described a common conflict between parents' expectations and students' aspirations:

(B/T4/K1)

"orang tua itu terkadang mereka ingin anak saya itu harus jurusan A di kampus A padahal dari kenyataan, dari nilai siswa, dari kemampuan siswa kita tahu dong kemampuan siswa kita sejauh mana apakah mereka nanti benar-benar bisa melampauinya"

The tension between parental aspiration and student agency is one of the biggest sources of anxiety for Indonesian students in the context of college selection. Participants position themselves as a bridge between the two through a three-party forum:

(B/T4/K2)

"kami akan mendampingi siswa dan orang tua untuk berbincang untuk mengobrol, kira-kira apa sih yang diinginkan anak dan apa sih yang diinginkan orang tua, biar anak dan orang tua itu satu jalur"

This mediation practice requires complex communication skills, including the ability to convey data objectively without hurting the parents' feelings. Participants described their most emotional moments of mediation:

(B/T4/K5)

"waktu itu sampai siswa saya menangis Kak, karena orang tuanya memang agak sedikit memaksa untuk kampus di A, namun saya bilang Bapak ini kalau kampus yang dipilih anak Bapak sudah bagus lho Pak"

The crying of students in this forum is an indicator of how heavy the pressure experienced by students is due to the misalignment between their own desires and parents' expectations. Participants not only act as data presenters, but also as emotional buffers for students. The success of the mediation is reflected in:

(B/T4/K6 & B/T4/K7)

"akhirnya orang tuanya legowo juga kak. Karena memahami kondisi anak dan kondisi nilai, ibaratnya seperti itu."

Then, after the forum session ends:

(B/T4/K7)

"keluar dari forum, anak-anak habis nangis saya bilang, gapapa pilihanmu bagus kok sudah sesuai dengan apa yang kamu inginkan dan sesuai dengan mimpimu"

The dual role of participants as data mediators and emotional supporters reflects the concept of teacher as counselor in the context of holistic education (Rogers, 1969). The participant himself summed up his position emphatically:

(B/T4/K8)

"peran saya sebagai pengajar dan wali kelas di bimbingan belajar tersebut itu sangat penting untuk antara anak dan orang tua, saya di posisi untuk menjadi penengah agar orang tua dan anak satu suara untuk menggapai mimpi sang anak."

Although the available artifacts do not explicitly show conversations between teachers and parents, some of them still reinforce the teacher's position as a trusted companion figure in important academic moments. In Artifact 3, students who were accepted on campus through UTBK expressed their gratitude for the teacher *"selalu gercep kalau diajakin tambahan,"* which shows that teachers are present as a support for a long academic process, not just a material presenter. Artifact 6 also shows that students ask the teacher for prayers ahead of the registration of new students in the domicile pathway, and the teacher responds with soothing emotional support. This evidence does not replace the findings of interviews on parent-student mediation, but corroborates them indirectly by suggesting that teachers have occupied a position as trusted figures in important academic decisions. In the framework of Bronfenbrenner (1979), this can be read as part of the cross-systems interaction between individuals, families, and educational contexts. The role of the teacher as a soothing companion is also in line with Rogers' (1969) idea of the teacher as a facilitator who helps students move emotionally and academically. Therefore, although the theme of mediation remains based on interviews, artifacts indicate that the social legitimacy of teachers as mediators is born from the relationships that are built continuously with students.

Theme 5: Student Transformation From Fear to Confidence

The fifth theme is a culmination of the previous four themes, how the affective strategies applied by the participants have an impact on the transformation of students from a state of anxiety and fear to confidence and courage to participate. In the perspective of narrative inquiry, this transformation is understood as restorying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), the process in which students rewrite their self-narrative from *'aku tidak bisa'* to *'aku bisa'*.

The first transformation described by the participants occurred when students who were previously afraid of being wrong began to dare to reveal the answer:

(B/T5/K2)

"dengan demo yang seperti itu, mereka itu merasa oh iya, ternyata kalau mengungkapkan jawaban itu pun salah gak apa-apa loh di kelas, gak ada yang marahin aku loh, gak ada yang mojokin aku loh"

This change in perception, from *'class as a place of judgment'* to *'class as a safe space'*, is a fundamental cognitive-affective transformation. Participants then described how these changes impacted student participation behavior consistently:

(B/T5/K3)

"setelah saya menerapkan hal-hal yang seperti itu, siswa itu jadi sering menjawab gitu loh kak, jadi entah walaupun jawabannya apapun itu, entah berbeda dari yang siswa yang satu dengan yang lainnya, itu mereka berani menjawab"

An increase in the frequency of verbal participation, regardless of the accuracy of the answers, is a significant indicator of a decrease in communicative anxiety. In language research, the courage to speak even if it is imperfect is an important marker of willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

The most profound dimension of this transformation is the shift from externality to the internalization of self-confidence:

(B/T5/K4 & B/T5/K5)

"dia bilang iya ya kak, aku kan udah belajar, aku kan udah belajar lebih giat lagi, nah jadi kayak dia merasa terdorong, oh iya aku udah belajar loh, aku tuh bisa jadi mereka hanya merasa dirinya itu kayak butuh validasi"

The phrase *"mereka hanya butuh validasi"* spoken by participants is a very sharp pedagogical insight. Anxious students are often not a lack of ability, but rather a lack of recognition of their abilities. These findings are in line with the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), where a person's belief in one's own abilities depends more on affirmative experience than actual ability.

This transformation is ultimately reflected in the response of students who are actively looking for the same teacher:

(B/T5/K6)

"Kak, saya request bahasa Inggrisnya sama Kak Bunga. Kak, aku mau nanti ketika tambahan tes bahasa Inggrisnya, sama Kak Bunga aja. Diajar Kak Bunga seru, diajar Kak Bunga asik."

The student's request to be specifically taught by the participant is the most authentic expression of trust, proof that the affective relationships built have succeeded in creating a meaningful learning environment.

Then, the Participant summarized the overall impact of his approach:

(B/T5/K7)

"dampaknya di kelas saya itu mereka akan menjadi lebih aktif, menjadi lebih merasa diperhatikan, menjadi tidak tertekan karena kita mendekatkan dengan mereka dan kita sudah mencairkan suasana."

The participants' narratives depict a coherent pedagogical cycle: a strong professional identity (T1) allows for accurate anxiety readings (T2), which is then responded to with planned safe space strategies (T3), reinforced by systemic mediation (T4), and results in real transformation in the student self (T5). In the style of narrative inquiry, this journey is not just a teaching story, but a narrative about how a teacher builds himself and a humane learning world for his students.

The transformation of students from fear to confidence is also seen very strongly in the artifacts. In Artifact 4, the student who previously feels to *"sedikit gemetar"* before the test then answer with *"SIAPPP,"* which indicates an immediate change from anxiety to readiness. Artifact 5 shows that teachers not only help students understand the English literacy *SNBT* material, but also calm students when overthinking. This suggests that growth in confidence comes along with an increase in academic understanding. Artifact 3 showed even more concrete results, when students accepted to university, the student thanked the teacher for always being fast-respond to help with additional sessions, which signaled that affective and academic support had led to real achievements. Meanwhile, Artifact 1 and Artifact 2 show a very positive emotional relationship, which shows that transformation is not only in the form of the courage to answer, but also a change in the way students interpret the teacher, the class, and themselves. These findings are in line with Bandura's (1997) on self-efficacy and with MacIntyre et al. (1998) on willingness to communicate, that self-confidence grows when students experience consistent and safe reinforcement. In other words, these artifacts make the change of the student seem more real than anxious, to calm from doubt, to be prepared and from simply learning to feeling capable.

E. CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experience of an EFL private tutor in lowering students' affective filters within a private tutoring context through a narrative inquiry approach. The findings demonstrate that reducing students' affective barriers is not achieved through a single instructional technique, but through a relational and emotionally responsive teaching process. Across the narrative, the tutor's professional identity, sensitivity toward students' anxiety, creation of a psychologically safe learning environment, mediation between students and parents, and continuous emotional support collectively contributed to students' transformation from fear and hesitation to greater confidence and willingness to participate in English learning.

The findings suggest that private tutoring provides opportunities for teachers to respond more personally to learners' emotional needs than is often possible in formal classrooms. Rather than functioning solely as knowledge transmitters, private tutors may also act as emotional companions who recognize students' anxiety, provide validation, encourage risk-taking, and foster trusting relationships. Such practices help lower students' affective filters, enabling them to engage more confidently in language learning. The supporting artefacts further reinforce that students valued not only academic assistance but also the emotional reassurance, encouragement, and sense of security provided by the tutor throughout their learning journey.

This study also offers several practical implications. For English teachers, emotionally responsive pedagogical practices, including the use of supportive feedback, humor, non-judgmental responses, and empathetic communication, may contribute to a more psychologically safe learning environment. For educational institutions, particularly tutoring centers and schools, affective support should be recognized as an essential component of effective language instruction rather than merely an additional interpersonal skill. Furthermore, teacher education programs may benefit from incorporating greater attention to affective pedagogy, relational competence, and strategies for addressing learner anxiety alongside methodological training.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single participant within one private tutoring context. As a narrative inquiry, the purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of one lived experience rather than to produce statistically generalizable findings. Future studies may extend this work by involving multiple tutors, comparing private and formal educational settings, or incorporating learners' perspectives to provide a broader understanding of how emotionally supportive teaching practices influence language learning across different contexts.

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