# The Effect of Regulatory Focus and Reference of Comparison Feedback on EFL Learners' Achievement Emotions and Achievement Goals

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## Abstract

This study aimed at examining the effects of the feedback types designed based on the regulatory focus theory (i.e., prevention vs. promotion) and reference of comparison (i.e., normative vs. self-referential) on achievement emotions and achievement goals. One hundred intermediate English language learners were assigned to four experimental groups, promotion, prevention, self-referential, normative, and one control group (N= 20 for each). The participants in the experimental groups received feedback based on their assignment for 16 sessions, and their achievement emotions and achievement goals were assessed before and after the intervention. ANCOVA analyses revealed that significant differences existed between the four experimental groups and the control group regarding achievement emotions and achievement goals. Self-referential feedback and promotion feedback increased positive emotions and led students to mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goal adoption, while normative feedback and prevention feedback increased negative emotions. Furthermore, normative feedback positively affected performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals. Prevention-focused feedback had a positive effect on mastery-avoidance goals. The researchers recommended that teachers use feedback emphasizing learners' growth and improvement as a means for progress check.

**Introduction**

Inquiries in the realm of feedback have broadened and deepened throughout the years to include different theoretical frames, namely behaviorist and cognitive theories. Feedback, however, should be considered from the vantage point of positive psychology as well since it can exert an impact on affective factors (Rowe et al., 2014). The significance of the role played by the affective factors in language learning is indisputable (Arnold, 2021). Among these affective factors, achievement emotions play an integral role in foreign language learning (Shao, 2019) and speaking skill in particular, which has been referred to as the most anxiety-provoking skill (Bashori et al., 2020). Experiencing negative emotions, especially anxiety can have debilitating effects on speaking performance (Abrar et al., 2018).

Achievement goals are other psychological factors that play an essential role in foreign language learning (Miller, 2018). As one of the individual differences, language learners' goal-orientation can explain the differences in language achievement (Daumiller & Zarrinabadi, 2021). For example, language learners who pursue mastery goals have shown higher language achievement (Tercanlioglu, 2004). One important problem is that instructional factors might guide students to maladaptive achievement goals (Shin et al., 2017), which can lead to negative emotions and poor performance, since achievement goals are closely tied to achievement emotions (Pekrun et al., 2009). Thereby, it is reasonable to find their joint antecedent to get information about teaching practices promoting students' participation and engagement (Pekrun et al., 2014).

Previous research has indicated that feedback can exert an impact on achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006) and achievement goals (Negru, 2009), which can consequently affect learning behaviors and learning outcomes (Goetz et al., 2019). SLA researchers have long recognized the emotional effects of feedback as one of the instructional strategies. However, these studies have mostly been limited to corrective feedback, paying little attention to other feedback types such as affective feedback. This study argues that feedback based on regulatory focus theory and reference of comparison can be used in speaking classes to maximize learners' achievement, while reducing the risk of emotional damage. Therefore, given the functional relevance between achievement emotions and goals, the current study tried to focus on the effect of behavioral feedback on these two important psychological variables.

**Literature Review**

**Feedback types**

**Regulatory focus feedback**

Regulatory focus theory, a theory of human motivation, was introduced by Higgins (1998). This theory distinguishes between the motivation toward approaching desirable states and avoiding undesirable ones and is useful for understanding approach and avoidance behaviors (Higgins, 1998). Higgins (1998) contends that generally, people pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Similarly, they approach positive outcomes and prevent negative ones. Based on this theory, feedback given to individuals should be consistent with their goal orientation. Therefore, feedback can be focused on learners' attainment and progress (promotion-focused)

or obligations and duties (prevention-focused). When holding promotion focus, students are motivated to align themselves with their ideal selves and pay attention to their growth, development, aspirations, and wishes. However, when holding prevention focus, students tend to match themselves with their ought selves based on expected duties, responsibilities, and obligations (Higgins, 1998).

Considering this theory's tenets, two types of feedback can be designed to be implemented in classrooms. One is promotion-focused feedback emphasizing language learners' successful performance, accomplishments, and growth. The other is prevention-focused feedback, which reminds students of their duties, obligations, and the examiner's expectations (Shin et al., 2017). These types of feedback boost motivation by highlighting the value of the goal. Additionally, if the feedback aligns with the goals and objectives that students set for their learning (prevention/ promotion), they pursue the learning process more eagerly, and the result will be higher achievement (Higgins, 2005). Regulatory focus theory should be considered important in L2 studies, too due to the role it plays in understanding learners' motivational self-system. For example, promotion feedback raises learners' ideal L2 self since it inclines them toward their ideal self, while prevention feedback is more likely to orient individuals toward L2 ought-to self (Shah et al., 1998).

Based on a recent research by Zarrinabadi and Dehkordi (2021) promotion and prevention feedback types can influence EFL learners' anxiety, willingness to communicate, and communication competence. They noted that promotion feedback can boost learners' willingness to communicate, relieve their anxiety level, and increase classroom participation. By contrast, prevention feedback was found to be a source of stress and fear for learners and inhibited them from speaking and further participation. Similarly, Zarrinabadi and Rezazadeh (2020) contend that feedback focusing on language learners' success in reaching their goals can improve their motivation because of the effect that having goal exerts on the value attached to task performance.

## Reference of comparison feedback

Feedback can be categorized based on the reference of comparison that teachers adopt as their standard. One criterion for comparison is intrapersonal or self-referential, and the other is normative or interpersonal. In the former, feedback is focused on learners' attainment, progress, and potential regardless of other students' performance, while in the latter, the performance of each student is compared with other peers (Butler, 2000). That is, for this type of feedback, social comparison mechanisms are at work (Wheeler & Suls, 2005).

Hughes et al. (2014) hold that comparing learners' performance throughout the course of time (self-referential comparison) sustains their motivation because in this way, learners will focus on their progress over time instead of competing with others. On a similar line, Chan and Lam (2010) argue that this type of feedback gives learners a sense of control over their progress. Besides, according to Zarrinabadi and Dehkordi (2021) presenting self-referential feedback improves language learners' communicative competence through the effect it has on their WTC and decreases anxiety. Guenette (2007) contends that despite a large body of research on feedback, feedback designers fail to design a feedback type that takes individual differences into account. Providing language learners with self-referential feedback

considering learner's progress and competence can solve this problem. Table 1 demonstrates some examples of feedback based on regulatory focus and reference of comparison.

**Table 1.** Examples of feedback types

| Type of feedback | Example |
| --- | --- |
| Promotion | Well done, you used complex grammatical structures. |
| | Great, you have a good command of conditional sentences. |
| | Nice, good choice of words, excellent. |
| Prevention | You are expected to use more complex sentences |
| | To be regarded as a fluent speaker, you have to have less hesitation. |
| | You made lots of grammatical mistakes, and for the examiner, it means you are not accurate. |
| | Using simple sentences has a negative impression on the examiner |
| Self-referential | You used a wider range of vocabulary in this task in comparison with previous tasks. |
| | I see your fluency has improved a lot compared with the first sessions. |
| Normative | You seem to be better than your classmates in using idiomatic expressions |
| | Compared to your classmate, you used a wider range of grammatical structures. |

## Achievement goals

Achievement goals are "competence-based aims used to guide behavior" (Elliot et al., 2011, p. 632). Based on achievement goal theory, students' motivational orientation is represented by two primary achievement goals: performance goals and mastery goals (Dweck & Legget, 1988). Later, goal theory was expanded to a trichotomous goals perspective by adding approach and avoidance dimensions to performance goals. Accordingly, this theory involves mastery-approach goals, which are focused on understanding and development of competence, performance-approach goals that highlight demonstrating a better performance compared with others, and performance- avoidance goals emphasizing avoidance of failure and looking incompetent. Finally, this theory was extended into a 2×2 framework by adding mastery avoidance goals, which represent avoidance of incomplete understanding (learning failure) or understanding less than one's potential (Elliot, 2005).

There is evidence that mastery goals have substantial positive nexus with learning strategy use and high achievement (Matos et al., 2007). Performance-approach goals, however, have shown a more complicated picture. They predict negative outcomes like anxiety and positive ones like hard effort (Senko et al., 2013). Both performance-avoidance and mastery-avoidance goals are associated with disinterest, anxiety, disorganized strategy use, and poor academic achievement (Pekrun et al., 2009). Likewise, in the study conducted by Han and McDonough (2019) language learners with prevention orientation reported more anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Students tend to avoid or approach a goal based on various personal and contextual factors. Classroom tasks and the message they communicate, social and compensation strategies are

but a few of these factors (Phan, 2008). Urdan and Kaplan (2020) refer to the definition of success within the class as one of the factors which can manifest itself in students' achievement goal profile. Similarly, in the delineation of the process of goal setting, Miller (2018) refers to feedback as the third stage in which whether grades or written comments from the teacher or student self-reflection affect students' learning goals. A few studies have investigated the effect of feedback on students' achievement goals. For example, Shin et al. (2017) examined the influence of regulatory focus and reference of comparison feedback on elementary and middle school students' endorsement of achievement goals. They found that normative feedback encourages students to pursue performance goals. In this study, not any one of the feedback types significantly affected mastery goal adoption. Pekrun et al. (2014) reported that receiving self-referential feedback inclines students towards mastery goals, in contrast receiving normative feedback inclines them towards performance goals.

Senko and Harackiewicz (2005) found that success feedback urges college students to adopt performance and mastery approach goals, while failure feedback promotes performance-avoidance goal adoption. Butler (2006) found that anticipating normative feedback orients students toward performance goals, while anticipating self-referential feedback encourages them to adopt mastery goals. Similarly, Chan and Lam (2010) contend that normative feedback weakens students' self-efficacy and consequently urges them to pursue performance-avoidance goals to avoid appearing incapable compared with others.

## Achievement emotions

Achievement emotions are defined as 'emotions that are directly linked to achievement activities or achievement outcomes' (Pekrun et al., 2010; p. 37). They are emotions attributed to success and failure in the learning process and outcome (Pekrun et al., 2017). The enjoyment learners experience throughout learning, boredom arising from classroom instruction, or frustration and anger resulting from a difficult task are some examples.

Achievement emotions play a determining role in shaping students' learning behavior. They can predict students' academic attainment and help them decide whether to persist or drop out of educational programs (Camacho-Morles et al., 2021). The importance of emotions is more highlighted in language learning and they are regarded as one of the factors underlining language acquisition (Khodadady & Younesi, 2017). They can activate the person's potential to learn a language and facilitate learning by making the atmosphere friendly and enjoyable (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). For example, guilt is positively related to motivation and language achievement (Teimouri, 2018). Enjoyment has a positive relation with learners' self-perception of their language achievement and can predict willingness to communication (Li, 2020; Lee, 2020). Speaking anxiety instills fear in individuals that deters them from expressing themselves orally (Suleimenova, 2013). Thereby, teachers should pay enough attention to their teaching practices because of the effects they can have on language learners' emotions and achievement (Khani & Ghasemi, 2018).

Different factors can affect emotions experienced by EFL learners. For example, teachers who are friendly and try to provide a class with a positive atmosphere foster their students' emotional well-being and subsequently, their language development (Dewaele et al., 2019). Likewise, activities which provide learners with a sense of progress boost positive emotions in

language classes (Richards, 2020). Lack of teacher engagement, using the same method of teaching, and uninteresting topics are found as the main contributors to boredom (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2020).

Students experience a range of emotions when receiving feedback, and their emotional reaction to feedback is influenced by the social and cognitive dimensions of feedback (Han & Hyland, 2019; Haga & Reinders, 2021). Similarly, Rowe et al. (2014) refer to feedback as one of the antecedents of emotions. Pekrun et al. (2014) found that feedback conditions can importantly predict emotions. In more detail, self-referential feedback boosts enjoyment, hope, and pride. Contrarily, normative feedback promotes anxiety, hopelessness, and shame.

Considering the lack of research on the effect of affective feedback types on the psychological factors of EFL learners, this study aimed to focus on feedback types that were not practiced by the previous studies. Besides, despite the evolution of emotional theories in educational psychology, a limited number of foreign language inquiries have considered a comprehensive range of emotions involved in language learning and use (Fraschini & Tao, 2021). Therefore, the present study tried to bridge the gap by focusing on a spectrum of emotions. Furthermore, the effects that teacher's comments may exert on learners' goals were intended to be examined. The research questions were:

1. To what extent does the feedback related to regulatory focus and reference of comparison affect FEL learners' achievement emotions?

2. To what extent does the feedback related to regulatory focus and reference of comparison affect FEL learners' achievement goals?

## Method

### Design

A pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design was used to investigate the research questions of the study. It was a between-group factor design in which the effects of the manipulation of feedback types by assigning language learners to one of the four experimental conditions (prevention, promotion, self-referential, and normative) on EFL learners' achievement emotions and achievement goals was examined.

### Participants

A total of one hundred intermediate Iranian EFL learners learning general English to prepare for the IELTS exam in a language institute in Isfahan, Iran, participated in this research. The reason for which this proficiency level was chosen is that the language learners of this level are more likely to have a clear perception of their goals and affective state. Moreover, they have not yet learned many aspects of the target language, and hence make more errors than advanced learners. The participants were both female and male, with the age range of 18 to 30. Since random selection was not possible, convenience sampling was applied to select the participants, but the division of the classes into normative (N=20), self-referential (N=20), prevention (N=20), promotion (N=20), and control group (N=20) was random. All the groups were homogenous regarding their OPT scores, syllabus, and the number of sessions (16 sessions, each lasted 90 minutes). For all the groups, their course was an online class comprising

speaking, listening, and reading skills with a particular focus on communication. All of them studied *Active reading 2* and *Headway Academic Skills 3* as their references. The groups were taught by the same Iranian female language instructor (age: 28, teaching experience = 6 years, educational background: Ph.D. student in English teaching). The teacher, who was one of the researchers of the article, was the same for all the classes and was completely familiar with the feedback types and the way of implementing them by studying six months in this subject.

## Experimentation

The intervention implemented in the study included providing prevention, promotion, self-referential, and normative feedback on the experimental group participants' speaking performance. Considering the tenets of regulatory focus theory, language learners in the promotion-focused group received feedback emphasizing their strengths and successful performance when their answer was error-free. More specifically, they received positive feedback in the form of encouragement and praise (e.g., 'Terrific! Your level of vocabulary has really developed'). However, when their performance contained errors, no feedback was provided, and their errors were tolerated.

In the prevention-focused group, the participants received feedback highlighting their weakness when their answer was incorrect or included one or more errors. They were told that their performance was not acceptable and they had to make more effort (e.g., 'Try to check the pronunciation of the words before attending the class'). No feedback was presented when their performance was error-free.

For the feedback based on the reference of comparison, in the self-referential group, feedback was given considering the students' progress compared with their previous performance (e.g., 'In this task, you used a wider range of grammatical structures than the previous task'). This means the teacher focused entirely on each learners' performance individually without taking other students' performance into account. In the normative feedback group, however, the feedback was given relative to other language learners' performance, and learners' performance was compared with each other (e.g., 'Regarding lexical diversity, your speaking was richer than your classmate'). The feedback received by learners was regarding different aspects of oral performance. After 16 sessions, the participants' achievement emotions and achievement were assessed again.

## Instruments

### Achievement Goals Questionnaire

Achievement goals questionnaire designed by Elliot and Murayama (2008) was used to collect data on the participants' profile of achievement goals. This questionnaire consists of four dimensions of achievement goals (mastery-approach goals: e.g. 'My aim is to completely master the material presented in this class', mastery-avoidance goals: e.g. 'I am striving to avoid an incomplete understanding of the course material', performance-approach goals: e.g. 'My aim is to perform well relative to other students', performance-avoidance goals: e.g. 'My aim is to avoid doing worse than other students'.) and is organized into 12 items. Participants responded on a scale of 1 = absolutely disagree to 5 = absolutely agree. In this study,

Cronbach's reliability estimates for the questionnaire in pretest and posttest conditions were .83 and .77, respectively.

## Achievement emotions scale

The participants' emotions were assessed using achievement emotions questionnaire designed by Pekrun et al. (2011). Nine emotions including (pride, hopelessness, enjoyment, hope, anger, anxiety, shame, boredom, relief) were measured. (e.g., "Thinking about class makes me feel uneasy", "I get embarrassed during the class") on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability estimates for the scale in the pretest and posttest were .77 and .79, respectively.

## Procedure

Achievement goals questionnaire and achievement emotions questionnaire, which had gone through translation and back-translation procedures by two experts in the field of TEFL, were first administered to 10 intermediate language learners to ensure clarity of the items of the translated versions of the questionnaires. Then, Cronbach's alpha of reliability was calculated for both the afore-mentioned instruments. After confirming the reliability and validity of these questionnaires, they were administered as the pre-test. After the intervention (feedback manipulation), the participants completed the two mentioned questioners as the post-test.

## Results

## Effect of Feedback Types on Achievement Emotions

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics for the achievement emotions of the five groups in pretest and posttest conditions.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Emotions for the Groups

| Group | Pretest | | Posttest | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Self-referential | 65.15 | 4.57 | 63.20 | 4.08 |
| Normative | 63.35 | 5.01 | 67.35 | 6.49 |
| Promotion | 65.25 | 5.02 | 66.20 | 3.57 |
| Prevention | 64.25 | 5.07 | 66.60 | 5.04 |
| Control | 64.95 | 8.27 | 65.50 | 7.68 |

Based on Table 2, the pretest scores were not equivalent for the five groups. Additionally, Table 2 shows that the mean scores for the posttest of the normative and prevention groups are larger than those of self-referential, promotion and control groups. However, the extent to which these differences can be attributed to the difference in the pretest scores was not clear. Therefore, holding the pretest scores constant, the ANCOVA statistical procedure was implemented to check whether the difference between the posttest scores was significant or not (Table 3). Firstly, the preliminary assumptions for running ANCOVA including the normality, homogeneity of regression slopes, linearity, and homogeneity of error variances were checked and satisfied.

**Table 3.** Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Analysis of Covariance

| Source | df | F | *Sig.* | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected model | 5 | 7.300 | .000 | .280 |
| Intercept | 1 | 37.319 | .000 | .284 |
| Emotion pretest | 1 | 28.412 | .000 | .232 |
| Feedback | 4 | 2.775 | .031 | .106 |
| Error | 94 | | | |
| Total | 100 | | | |
| Corrected total | 99 | | | |

As reported in Table 3, after adjusting for pretest scores, a significant effect for the feedback $F(4, 94) = 2.77$, $P = .03$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$) was shown. Since $P < .05$, it was concluded that the mean scores of the groups on the posttest differed after removing the possible effect of their entry knowledge. Further, considering the post-hoc comparison tests (Table 4), the difference between the mean scores of the self-referential and normative groups was significant ($MD = 5.00$, $P < .05$).

**Table 4.** Pairwise Comparison of Means for the Five Groups

| (A) Group | (B) Group | Mean difference | *Sig* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-referential | Normative | -5.002[*] | .021 |
| | Promotion | -2.953 | .641 |
| | Prevention | -3.826 | .172 |
| | Control | -2.395 | 1.000 |
| Normative | Promotion | 2.050 | 1.000 |
| | Prevention | 1.176 | 1.000 |
| | Control | 2.608 | 1.000 |
| Promotion | Prevention | -.874 | 1.000 |
| | Control | .558 | 1.000 |
| Prevention | Control | 1.431 | 1.000 |

To scrutinize the effects of the feedback types on emotions within the groups, paired samples t-tests of the participants' pre-test and post-test scores were calculated (Figure 1). The results showed that in the self-referential group and promotion group, there was an increase in the mean scores of the positive emotions. Contrarily, in the normative group and prevention group, there was an increase in negative emotions.
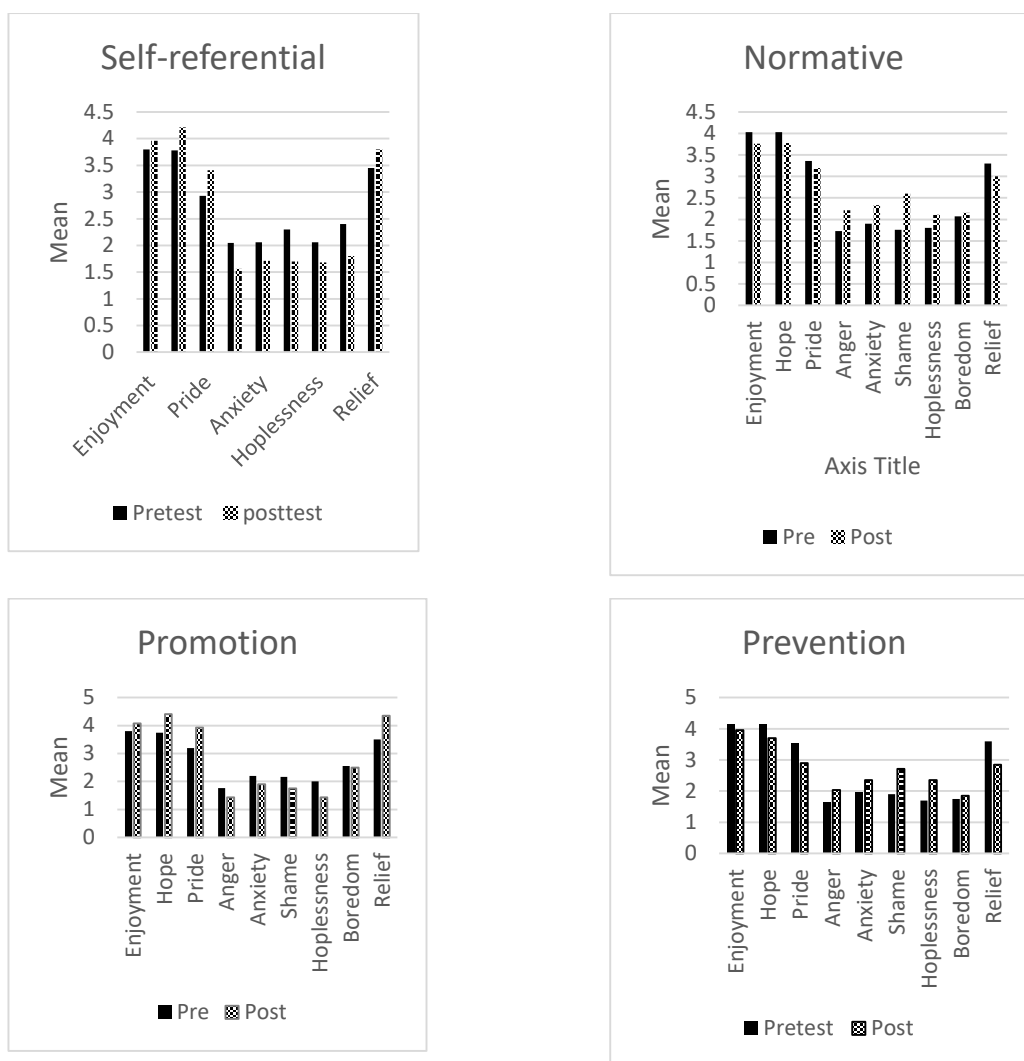
**Figure 1.** Achievement Emotions Pretest and Posttest in the Groups.

### Effect of Feedback Types on Achievement Goals

Table 5 depicts the descriptive statistics for the achievement goals of the five groups in the pretest and posttest conditions.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics of goals for the Groups

|  | Pretest | | | Posttest | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | M | SD | | M | SD |
| Self-referential | 46.75 | 6.24 | | 47.60 | 6.45 |
| Normative | 43.70 | 7.16 | | 50.10 | 4.90 |
| Promotion | 47.30 | 6.93 | | 47.00 | 6.56 |
| Prevention | 48.30 | 7.82 | | 47.50 | 6.46 |
| Control | 49.90 | 7.10 | | 46.95 | 6.70 |

As Table 5 shows, the pretest scores were not equivalent for the five groups. Furthermore, the posttest mean score for the normative group was higher than those of the rest of the groups.

However, the extent to which these differences were because of the difference in the pretest scores was not clear. Therefore, holding the pretest scores constant, the ANCOVA statistical procedure was implemented to check the differences between the posttest scores (Table 6). Also, all the assumptions for running ANCOVA were checked and met. There was a significant effect of the feedback on achievement goals $F$ (4, 94) = 11.10, $P$ = .00, partial $\eta^2$ = .32). Since $P < .05$, the conclusion was that the mean of the groups differed on the posttest after ruling out the impact of knowledge on the scores as measured in the pretest.

**Table 6.** Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Analysis of Covariance

| Source | df | F | *Sig.* | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected model | 5 | 37.797 | .000 | .668 |
| Intercept | 1 | 30.328 | .000 | .244 |
| Emotion pretest | 1 | 179.025 | .000 | .656 |
| Feedback | 4 | 11.107 | .000 | .321 |
| Error | 94 | | | |
| Total | 100 | | | |
| Corrected total | 99 | | | |

Besides, considering the post-hoc comparison tests (Table 7), there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the normative group and all the other groups ($P < .05$) concerning their goals.

**Table 7.** Pairwise Comparison of Means for the Five Groups

| (A)Group | (B)Group | Mean difference | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-referential | Normative | -4.683* | .001 |
| | Promotion | .994 | 1.000 |
| | Prevention | 1.210 | 1.000 |
| | Control | 2.905 | 156 |
| Normative | Promotion | 5.677* | .000 |
| | Prevention | 5.893* | .000 |
| | Control | 7.588* | .000 |
| Promotion | Prevention | .216 | 1.000 |
| | Control | 1.911 | 1.000 |
| Prevention | Control | 1.695 | 1.000 |

Moreover, paired samples comparisons for pretest and posttest scores were conducted to see within group differences after receiving each type of feedback (Figure 2). As Figure 2 shows, the mean scores for mastery-approach and mastery avoidance goals increased in the self-referential group and promotion-focused group. Normative feedback could increasingly change the mean scores on performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals. The mean scores of mastery avoidance increased in prevention-focused conditions.
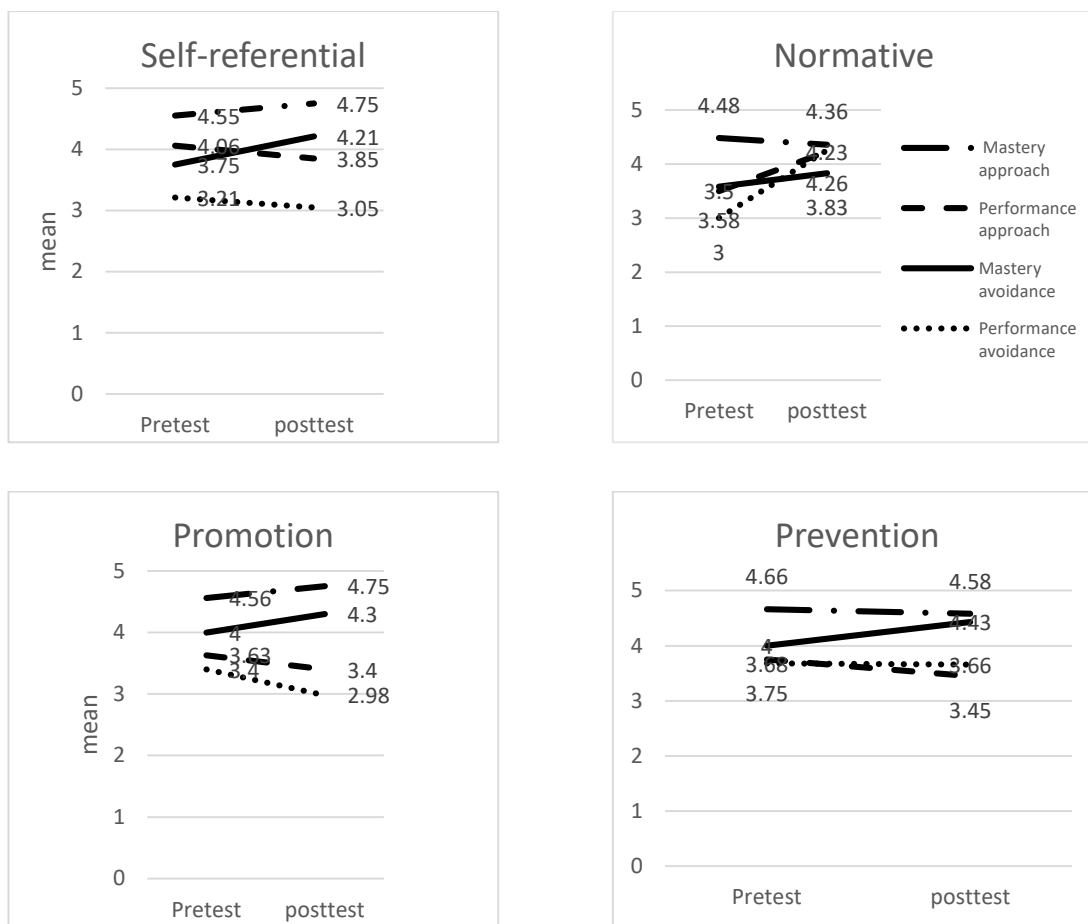
**Figure 2.** Achievement Goals Pretest Posttest Scores in the Groups.

## Discussion

### Effects of Feedback Types on Achievement Emotions

The findings suggest that feedback has clear effects on the achievement emotions of EFL learners. Further, comparing the groups indicated that self-referential and promotion feedback types arouse more positive emotions than normative and prevention feedback types. This is mainly because these two feedback types clearly indicate learners their successful performance than the other two types (Shin et al., 2017). Regarding the emotional effect of reference of comparison feedback, it was shown that self-referential feedback induces positive emotions, while normative feedback increases negative emotions. This finding can be explained by the model introduced by Pekrun et al. (2006) on the effect of achievement goals and achievement emotions which was also expanded to the effect of feedback on both achievement goals and achievement emotions. According to this model, mastery goals experienced by the self-referential group members facilitate positive emotions. Contrarily, performance-avoidance goals experienced by the normative-feedback group members evoke negative emotions. Similarly, the participants in the self-referential group of this study showed more tendency toward mastery goals which led them to experience positive emotions, while in the normative group, they adopted more performance-avoidance goals, which led them to experience negative emotions. These findings were consistent with the findings of Pekrun et al. (2014) in that self-

referential feedback boosts positive emotions such as hope and pride, while it reduces anger, and normative feedback increases anxiety, shame, and hopelessness.

Regarding regulatory focus feedback, it was shown that promotion-focused feedback produces a trend toward positive emotions, and prevention-focused feedback produces a trend toward negative emotions. Experiencing positive emotions in response to promotion-focused feedback and negative emotions in response to prevention-focused feedback can be justified by the control value theory of Pekrun (2006). Based on this theory, when students see that they are capable of mastering the material, learning becomes enjoyable for them, and perceiving high levels of control and positive value elicits pride, hope, or enjoyment. Contrarily, hopelessness or anxiety are consequences of perceiving low levels of control and negative value. In line with the propositions of this theory, receiving positive remarks in the promotion group aroused positive emotions and a sense of satisfaction in learners, while receiving negative remarks in the prevention group instigated negative emotions. Further, this finding can be justified by the self-discrepancy theory of Higgins (1987), which states that when a discrepancy exists between the way something is being done and the ideal way of doing something, the results will be negative emotional reactions, and the opposite case provokes positive emotions. Regarding the emotional effect of prevention-focused feedback, experiencing shame can be explained by the self-blame associated with performing less than what is expected, and experiencing anger is due to critical comments received on task performance (Rowe et al., 2014). These findings confirm the findings of Zarrinabadi & Dehkordi (2021) in that promotion feedback reduces anxiety, while prevention feedback increases it.

## Effects of Feedback Types on Achievement Goals

This study provides evidence for the effect of feedback on language learners' achievement goals. Furthermore, comparing the groups showed that there was a significant difference between the normative group and the rest of the groups in terms of achievement goals. A plausible justification is that considering the criterion-referenced nature of the assessment of the IELTS exam, in the other groups, students were inclined to focus on their own strengths and weakness to get a higher score; therefore, they adopted mastery goals. However, by receiving normative feedback, which includes comparing the performance of the class members with each other, the participants in the normative group tended to endorse more performance goals and behaved differently. Another reason could be that normative feedback orients learners to a learning goal which outlines success as outperforming others (Chan & Lam, 2010). This result corroborates the findings of Pekrun et al. (2014) and Shin et al. (2017), suggesting that normative feedback prompts endorsement of performance goals. By contrast, self-referential feedback prompted mastery-goals. This is maybe because this type of feedback functions as motivation that encourages learners to do their best. Likewise, self-referential feedback orients learners towards a learning goal that emphasizes incremental self-improvement (Chan & Lam, 2010). This finding confirms Pekrun et al. (2014) in that self-referential feedback prompts mastery goals.

Regarding the effect of regulatory focus feedback on achievement goals, promotion-focused feedback led students to adopt mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goals. Prevention-

focused feedback encouraged the adoption of mastery-avoidance goals. This finding can be justified by the proposition of regulatory focus theory that success feedback leads to an increase in expectancies. Providing learners with comments highlighting the positive aspects of their task performance motivated learners and increased their expectation of themselves to strive for reaching higher outcomes. However, the participants who received comments in which negative points of the performance were more salient tried to avoid those negative points and showed more tendency toward mastery-avoidance goals. However, this finding was in contrast to those of Shin et al. (2017), in that prevention-focused feedback increases performance-avoidance goal endorsement. This contradictory finding can be justified by the fact that the nature of the task can affect students' goal orientation (Han & McDonough, 2018). The participants in this study were preparing for the IELTS exam, and they were trying to improve their performance. Therefore, upon receiving negative comments on their task performance, they were encouraged more to protect themselves from possible grade lose which was due to performing less than they were able to and avoiding poor performance compared to others was not their concern.

## Conclusion

This research investigated the effect of feedback based on reference of comparison and regulatory focus on EFL learners' achievement emotions and achievement goals. The findings showed that different feedback types differentially affect students' emotions and goals. The results provided evidence on the beneficial effects of self-referential feedback on learners' achievement emotions and achievement goals. Overall, promotion feedback is preferred over prevention feedback because of its effect size on increasing positive emotions and reducing negative ones. Further, promotion feedback made a disposition toward mastery goals which are mostly associated with higher academic achievement. The findings highlight the significance of the effect of feedback on language learners' emotions and goals in speaking ability. Besides, this study notes the importance of presenting other types of feedback accompanying corrective feedback to improve psychological factors and lead language learners towards adaptive goals.

This study bears implications for speaking instructors. L2 speaking instructors who intend to provide an enjoyable and relaxing environment for language learners to practice speaking with motivation and hope to reach their goals are suggested to use self-referential feedback and promotion-focused feedback to provide feedback on their students' oral performance. Further, they have to find their students' strengths and weaknesses in each performance to compare them with that of their next performance.

Additionally, this study has some implications for research. For example, L2 researchers are suggested to do research on the effect of self-referential feedback and promotion feedback on other variables such as self-efficacy and motivation. Considering the fact that the data in this research is only of quantitative nature, which decreases the depth of the understanding of the issue, future studies should address the effect of feedback types on EFL learners' emotions qualitatively. We also suggest that future research examine the emotional and goal orientation impacts of regulatory focus and reference of comparison feedback on EFL learners with low and high-grade expectations.

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