



The Relation Between Iranian EFL Learners' Perception of Teacher Enthusiasm and Their Engagement in the Context of Second-Language Classrooms

Hossein Isaei¹  Hamed Barjesteh² 

1. PhD in ELT, Department of English Language and Literature, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran
hossein_isaei@yahoo.com (corresponding author)
2. Associate Professor of ELT, Department of English Language and Literature, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran
ha_bar77@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the intersection of perceived Teacher Enthusiasm (TE) and Learner Engagement (LE) in the context of second-language classrooms. To this goal, 92 Iranian advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners completed a self-report questionnaire on the effectiveness of teaching and learners' engagement. Two focus-group interviews were conducted, and a correlational analysis was performed. The results indicated a significant correlation between the two variables. Additionally, the analysis revealed three main themes testifying that perceived TE led to higher excitement and enjoyment for L2 learners, feelings of security and confidence, and a positive appraisal of teacher quality. It was also found that self-set goals and personal vision are significant antecedents of engagement, which may even outdo perceived TE. Emotional consequences were identified as the dominant links between the two variables. The results also revealed that perceived TE influences LE through stimulation and emotional arousal. The findings of this study recommend that ELT teachers' performance, enthusiasm, and behavior have a significant impact on EFL learners' evaluation of the quality of instruction.

Keywords: EFL learners, learner engagement, teacher enthusiasm

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1. Introduction

During the last decade, research on Teacher Enthusiasm (TE) has gained momentum in the field of second or foreign language (L2) learning and teaching. An increasing number of studies have been devoted to investigating the nature of TE and its associations with other teacher/learner variables (e.g., Burić & Moè, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Frenzel et al., 2019; Keller et al., 2018; Kuhn et al., 2024; Safdari, 2022; Wang & Derakhshan, 2021; Xue, 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2023). This growing attention is due to the conviction that TE characterizes effective teachers (Safdari, 2022) and is a major factor in promoting learner motivation and positive emotions (Cui et al., 2020; Fauth et al., 2019; Frenzel et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018). Moreover, scholars have found significant links between TE and several other variables such as autonomy (Cui et al., 2017), learner enjoyment (Frenzel et al., 2009), recall (Moè, 2016), academic achievement (Burić, 2019), and interest (König, 2020). As Burić and Moè (2020) maintain, TE has also been reported to boost teachers' emotions and well-being (Safdari, 2022). Dewaele and Li (2021) argue that, very recently, L2 researchers have demonstrated interest in scrutinizing the potential links between TE and another newly popularized language learner characteristic, namely Learner Engagement (LE).

LE is understood as learners' active involvement and participation in academic activities (Dörnyei, 2020). Research has shown that LE has a significant influence on learners' effort, enthusiasm, attention, and academic achievement (Carroll et al., 2021; Quin, 2017; Wei et al., 2024). According to Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), LE is the way motivation is expressed in learners' actions and behaviors. LE is all about how engaged or disengaged learners are during the learning process - how they think, feel, participate, and perform. Several studies have suggested that teacher emotions or motivational practices can impact the level of LE (e.g., Burić et al., 2023; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Lazarides et al., 2019; Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

However, the relationship between TE and LE has not been extensively researched. This gap in research is particularly noticeable in the field of L2 learning and teaching. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to fully understand the connection between these two factors in the L2 classroom. Additionally, if there is a relationship between TE and LE, to what extent is it significant and essential? What are the possible experiences or emotions that

arise when TE and LE intersect? It is important to determine how effective TE is at keeping language learners engaged in their classroom activities; therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between TE and LE and to uncover the emotions that are responsible for the connection between TE and L2 learners' level of engagement.

2. Literature Review

An extensive body of literature exists examining the relationship between personality traits and job-related aftereffects across various vocations, and the English Language Teaching (ELT) context has not been an exception. It is important to understand how L2 instructors' non-cognitive traits (i.e., personality characteristics) influence their behavior in the classroom and impact EFL learners' academic achievement (Burić et al., 2023). It is worth mentioning that in the field of L2 research, the concepts of *TE* and *LE* have extensively been studied independently, but their probable connection has received little attention. In this regard, the researchers will review the existing literature on these concepts separately, and then examine research studies that have explored the relationship between TE and LE, or other relevant emotions.

2.1. Teaching Quality

Understanding what makes a teacher effective is a complex task that involves several components. One of them is teaching quality, which is an idiosyncratic aspect of instructor effectiveness according to Goe et al. (2008). The term *teaching quality* is often used interchangeably with other terms, but it is a vital part of the teacher effectiveness construct (Burić et al., 2023). It comprises three main components: 1) input (e.g., teacher traits and qualifications), 2) processes also known as teaching quality or instructional quality (e.g., teacher practices), and 3) outcomes (e.g., influence on student engagement, achievement or social-emotional well-being).

Teaching quality is the ability to effectively teach a diverse range of students, maintain classroom discipline, meet the needs of students in a specific context, and achieve instructional goals (Darling-Hammond, 2015). In German-speaking contexts, a widely used teaching quality model is based on three core dimensions. These dimensions are defined by Praetorius et al.

(2018) as: a) classroom management, which involves identifying and promoting positive learner behavior while managing negative behavior, b) student support, which entails fostering social and emotional rapport between both learners and their teachers and among learners, and c) cognitive activation, which provides opportunities for knowledge acquisition as well as intellectual stimulation. The mentioned dimensions (cognitive, meta-cognitive, and motivational) are considered applicable across different cultures, grade levels, and school subjects, as they are generic (Burić et al., 2023; Praetorius et al., 2018).

2.2. Teacher Enthusiasm

Along with teaching quality, the teacher researchers evaluated EFL learners' perceptions of TE. TE is not just a characteristic that affects teaching quality but also a method of delivering high-quality instruction (Kunter et al., 2008). Additionally, Kunter et al. (2008, p. 470) defined TE as “the degree of enjoyment, excitement, and pleasure that teachers typically experience in their professional activities”. In particular, a large amount of research on teacher effectiveness suggests that TE is one of the key components of effective teaching (e.g., Burić et al., 2023; Safdari, 2022). In the same fashion, Keller et al. (2016) defined TE as “a set of behaviors in the classroom that convey energy and excitement and help create an environment conducive to learning”. Indeed, studies have shown that TE positively affects learners emotions, motivation, and interest to learn (e.g., Burić et al., 2023; Frenzel et al., 2018; König, 2021; Wang & Derakhshan, 2021; Xue, 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2023).

Kunter et al. (2011) declare that TE maintains two facets: 1) activity-related enthusiasm also known as teaching enthusiasm, and 2) topic-related enthusiasm also known as subject enthusiasm. To assess TE, it is important to consider whether students can differentiate between a teacher's genuine excitement and their teaching approach. Therefore, the researchers will use a student-rated scale to evaluate whether a teacher displays enthusiasm while teaching, taking into account a holistic view of their behavior.

Moreover, there has been a long-standing debate over how TE can be best understood and defined. One group of researchers has consistently examined TE as an internally experienced feeling, with a focus on teacher enjoyment and positive emotions (Keller et al., 2014). In addition, the second research approach used a different definition that focused on the

level of enthusiasm displayed by teachers as perceived by their students. In this perspective, teachers' excitement and enthusiasm are conveyed through observable behaviors and are detected by students using both verbal and non-verbal instructional cues. Besides, Keller et al. (2016) proposed a new definition that combines both strands (Lazarides et al., 2018). However, Keller et al.'s (2018) investigation indicated that the two dimensions do not necessarily occur together (Safdari, 2022).

Research has testified that TE is connected to several desirable consequences. These include increased learner interest, better academic achievement and success, greater perceived learning support for students, improved self-efficacy, more motivated behavior and active learning, and increased enjoyment (Burić & Moè, 2020; Keller et al., 2014; König, 2020; Kunter et al., 2013; Lazarides et al., 2018, 2019, 2021). Moreover, some studies have suggested that enthusiastic teachers tend to use better teaching methods (e.g., Baier et al., 2019; Burić et al., 2023; Frenzel et al., 2009; Kunter et al., 2008; Safdari, 2022; Xue, 2024).

2.3. Learner Engagement

LE can be viewed as "the exertion of one's physical and psychological ongoing effort during the learning process to realize academic achievement or learning goals" (Wei et al., 2024, p. 3). One of the variables closely related to L2 learners' achievement and the adaptive process in the class context is LE or involvement in the task (van Rooij et al., 2018). As Schaufeli (2017) maintains this feeling of well-being goes beyond the conditioning factors and commitments acquired and helps overcome obstacles (Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024; Quin, 2017). According to Ellis (2019, p. 48), engagement is a crucial element of learning and serves as a significant driving force. Mercer (2019) suggests that engagement differs from motivation in that it is characterized by action. Learners who are engaged are actively committed to participating in learning activities (Zhou et al., 2021). This kind of active involvement and dedication can cause positive outcomes, for example, academic achievement and meaningful learning (Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024; Hiver et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2017).

Research suggests that students who are engaged invest more attention, concentration, persistence, and behavioral self-regulation, which leads to improved learning outcomes and success (Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Quin, 2017; Svalberg, 2017). Being a multi-dimensional

construct, engagement consists of several components (Lambert et al., 2017). Engaging with a task, activity, or situation in the educational context (known as LE) involves social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement according to Philp and Duchesne's (2016) seminal work. LE relates to the active participation and positive attitude of students towards their learning process (Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024). Research has manifested that LE is associated with greater long-term knowledge retention and higher academic performance. Thus, LE is considered an essential component of (L2) learning. This is because successful learning of an L2 requires learners to persistently practice language use (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Engagement can occur at different levels, such as community, school, classroom, and tasks, which means that it can be examined over various timescales and scopes (Shernoff, 2013).

2.4. Four Dimensions of Learner Engagement

Engagement is a complex concept that comprises different components. According to Philp and Duchesne's (2016) research, LE has four dimensions: behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. Various studies have shown that LE is reflected in these four interconnected dimensions (e.g., Ferrer et al., 2020; Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024; Henry & Thorsen, 2020; Sandoval-Munoz et al., 2018). *Behavioral Engagement* pertains to the observable participation of learners in learning activities. Learners' behavioral engagement involves their participation in learning activities and tasks (e.g., lectures, course materials, video lectures, assessments, and discussion forums) as well as their effort and on-task attention and investment in the learning procedure (Kang, 2020; Wei et al., 2024). In the case of L2 learners, this participation is typically measured by the amount of production, voluntary involvement, persistence, time management, and even hand-raising during the learning process (Safdari, 2022). *Emotional Engagement* refers to the affective quality of learners' participation. It involves expressing positive emotions such as interest, curiosity, enjoyment, and enthusiasm towards what they have learned (Skinner et al., 2008). It is simply the way learners feel about the learning situation, activities, and people involved. These emotions can be either facilitative (e.g. enjoyment, enthusiasm, interest) or debilitating (e.g. boredom, anxiety, frustration), and they can significantly impact learners' performance. *Cognitive Engagement* is the process of mental activity and investment in learning. Engaged learners who are cognitively active put their

attention and thoughts into the learning process. This involves intentional and focused attention aimed at achieving specific learning goals. As per Kuo et al. (2021), cognitive engagement involves learners utilizing metacognitive self-regulation and high-order learning strategies to acquire content knowledge and master skills (Wei, Saab & Admiraal, 2024). Cognitive engagement is visible through activities such as questioning, hesitating, repeating, private speech, and non-verbal communication, as well as the intensity and quality of interaction. Learners showcase this engagement by exchanging ideas, providing feedback, and explaining concepts to others. Various studies have already highlighted the importance of cognitive engagement, including Baralt et al. (2016), Hiver et al. (2020), and Lambert et al. (2017). *Social Engagement* is closely associated with emotional engagement and highlights the significance of social context and communities of language learners. Research has shown that social engagement supports constructive rapport, communication, and feedback quality (Maronski & Toth, 2016). It focuses on contextual factors, such as patterns of interaction, the role of teachers, and the role of peers (Hiver et al., 2021; Quin, 2017; Svalberg, 2009).

2.5. Related Studies

Engagement is not solely dependent on the learner, but also on various contextual, cultural, instructional, and social factors (Zhou et al., 2021). These factors interact dynamically and can affect the learner's level of engagement (Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Qiu & Lo, 2017). Therefore, personal and contextual factors play a vital role in forming the learning experience and ultimately affecting engagement. Various studies have suggested that factors such as classroom practices, teacher behavior management, and school discipline have a significant impact on student engagement (Safdari, 2022). Similarly, TE is one of the variables that can potentially influence engagement. Several studies have manifested that when instructors exude enthusiasm in the classroom, it can influence students positively (Lazarides et al., 2021). This contagious enthusiasm can enhance emotions, motivation, and engagement among students.

In a study conducted by Lazarides et al. (2018), it was found that perceived TE is significantly interrelated with learners' mastery goal orientation. Such finding is also supported by a recent study conducted by Frommelt et al. (2021). Similarly, König (2020) reported that perceived TE has a significant impact on learners' enjoyment, motivation, and overall rating

of the teacher's instructional quality. Moreover, several studies have suggested that learners' perception of TE is closely linked with their level of interest in the subject-specific content (e.g., Frommelt et al., 2021).

To explore the relationship between students' perceived TE and their engagement and emotions, Dawaele and Li (2021) conducted research. The study held that there are significant positive correlations between these variables. The researchers concluded that perceptions of TE and LE are closely associated. They also suggested that emotions like boredom and enjoyment play a significant role in mediating this association.

Similarly, Cui et al. (2020) believe that learners' perception of TE is negatively associated with boredom in the classroom. Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021) pointed out that the desirable enjoyment and emotions of enthusiastic teachers are passed on to their students, positively impacting their performance. This explanation is a rudiment to Philp and Duchesne's (2016) ideas. They highlighted a connection between engagement and positive emotions. The researchers argued that students' perception of their teachers' feelings and behavior leads to emotional evaluations and judgments that, in turn, have (un)desirable consequences on students' engagement and performance.

According to the existing research, emotions play a vital role in the relationship between TE and LE. This means that when teachers are more engaged, students experience positive emotions, which results in improved engagement. This suggests a significant relationship between TE and LE. However, current research on this topic is limited and requires further investigation, especially in the field of L2 teaching and learning. There is a need for additional evidence to support the link between TE and LE. Furthermore, the influence of TE on LE through emotions is an area that requires deeper exploration (Safdari, 2022). The current literature has not fully explained the emotional factors that trigger the connection between TE and LE. Therefore, it is requisite to conduct further research to discern the nature and quality of this connection and shed light on the emotional factors that influence it by employing a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design (Ary et al., 2019), where qualitative data is collected after quantitative data, the current study aims to explore this relationship by addressing the following research questions.

2.6. Research Questions

1. Is there any statistically significant correlation between Iranian advanced EFL learners' perception of TE and their engagement?
2. What are the emotions that mediate the relationship between ELT TE and EFL LE?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A total of 90 Iranian EFL learners (45 males and 45 females) participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old, with 23.33 determined as their mean age. Based on the records of the private language school and portfolios of the learners, they were all attending advanced English courses. The language institute was located in Amol City, Mazandaran, Iran. Furthermore, the participants were selected through convenience sampling and were divided into six classes, three all-male and three all-female, with each class having 15 students. The study was conducted with the participation of six teachers, three male and three female, who taught each of the six classes. All the seasoned teachers had Master's degrees in TESOL from domestic universities and had an average teaching experience of 12 years. The age of the teachers ranged from 28 to 35 years, with an average age of 31. The classes were scheduled to meet twice a week, with each session lasting for 75 minutes.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. *The Questionnaire*

A self-report questionnaire was used to measure *LE* and *perceived TE* quantitatively. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first part of the questionnaire was used to collect respondents' demographic information (i.e., age and gender). The second part had four multi-item scales with a total of 28 items. One of the scales which had 4 items was adopted from Dewaele and Li (2021) to measure learners' perceived TE. The other three scales (adopted from Hiver et al., 2020) mainly focused on LE consisting of 24 items and 3 parts: 1) emotional engagement (8 items), 2) behavioral engagement (8 items), and 3) cognitive engagement (8

items). Respondents were required to respond to the items by selecting a number on a six-point Likert-type scale, which ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

In the current study, the four subscales yielded adequate indexes of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha calculated to be .79 for perceived TE, .81 for emotional engagement, .79 for behavioral engagement, and .86 for cognitive engagement.

3.2.2. Focus-Group Interview

Two focus-group interviews were arranged and conducted to gather qualitative data, with a purposive sample of twelve participants. The interviewees included two EFL learners from every class: those who scored the highest on the perceived TE scale, and those who achieved the highest mean scores on LE. Six participants with high *perceived TE* mean scores were interviewed in one session, and six participants with high *LE* mean scores were interviewed in another session. The main objective of the interviews was to explore students' feelings and ideas about TE, and how their perception of TE impacted their engagement and performance. The researchers used a few prompt questions and then let the respondents express their thoughts freely and openly. The respondents were assured that the session content would definitely be kept confidential and used merely for the current study. Their consent was also obtained to record the session. The interviews were conducted in Persian to ensure maximum comfort of expression, and each session took approximately 90 minutes to complete. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researchers.

3.3. Procedures

This study used a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design qualitative data was collected after quantitative data. First, after explaining the research aims and receiving consent from the EFL learners, a quantitative questionnaire was submitted to six classes during the sixth week of their academic term, after they had already attended ten sessions. The questionnaire took about 30 minutes on average, and the researchers were present in case there were any problems, but none arose. Two days after the questionnaire, the researchers conducted two interview sessions to collect qualitative data.

3.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 22 through correlational analysis. In addition, the qualitative data was analyzed through thematic coding analysis by following an inductive approach. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model was used for this analysis. Firstly, the recorded data was carefully transcribed and listened to. Then, the transcribed passages were read and reread to gain familiarity with the data and to notice the patterns and ideas embedded in them. Secondly, the meaning-carrying elements of the text that were related to the research goal were highlighted by the researchers after reading through the data set. After that, the initial codes were produced from the data, and the extracts related to each code were marked. In the research process, the codes that were identified were grouped to identify themes that could represent an overarching category. The themes that emerged were then reviewed to ensure that they were compatible with the codes and the raw data. If any themes lacked sufficient support, they were removed, and if any were too large, they were broken down into separate themes. Once the themes were refined, they were matched with relevant extracts to ensure they were a suitable representation of the data. Finally, in the sixth phase, the researchers prepared the final report, selecting the most appropriate extracts to illustrate and exemplify the themes that were finalized.

4. Results

4.1. the First Research Question

The obtained quantitative data is presented in Table 1, which shows that all scales had reliability estimates above acceptable levels.

A correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the probable connection between EFL learners' perceived TE and LE. To ensure the normal distribution of data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was employed, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

After confirming the assumption of normality, a Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between perceived TE and LE. According to the results of Table 3, the analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r =$

.611, $n = 90$, $p = .000$), indicating a close association between perceived TE and EFL LE. The summary of correlation results is depicted in Table 3.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Questionnaire Data

Questionnaire Sections	Scales	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
First Section	Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm	90	3.19	0.85	0.79
	Behavioral Engagement	90	3.99	0.73	0.79
Second Section	Emotional Engagement	90	4.21	0.83	0.81
	Cognitive Engagement	90	3.59	0.73	0.80

Table 2

Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	
	Statistic	Sig
EFL Learner Engagement	.199	.151
Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm	.129	.089

Table 3

Results of Correlation Between Perceived TE and LE

Variables		LE	Perceived TE
EFL Learner Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	92
Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm	Pearson Correlation	.611**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.2. the Second Research Question

The second research question was answered using the qualitative interview data. After the analysis, several concepts and themes emerged that represent the EFL learners’ thoughts and emotions about the impact of teachers’ enthusiasm on their engagement and learning. In this regard, the data analysis showed how learners felt about the perceived effectiveness and importance of teachers’ enthusiasm for their engagement and performance. In the following section, these themes are presented with examples from the interviewees’ quotations. To protect their privacy, respondents’ real names are not mentioned.

4.2.1. Teacher Quality Evidence

During interviews, advanced Iranian EFL learners often express their opinions about the effectiveness and quality of their teachers. A common theme that conjures up from the following conversations is that EFL learners judge and evaluate their teachers based on their

level of enthusiasm. Whether a teacher is energetic and passionate or appears unenthusiastic and disinterested, students tend to take this into account when assessing their teacher's effectiveness. Both interview groups agree that teachers' enthusiasm is a reliable indicator of their expertise and quality. Concerning this issue, one interviewee said:

Extract 1.

To be a good teacher, it is essential to have the willingness to teach and work with students. A teacher who behaves like a reluctant employee at a governmental office, regardless of their knowledge, is of no use. A good teacher creates interest and motivation in the classroom and shows great happiness about it. So, if my teacher is enthusiastic and eager to teach, I ensure that he or she understands the subject matter well. Bahman was an interviewee who also believed that having high levels of energy is an important characteristic of effective teachers. He was part of a group of highly motivated learners. Yet, he believed that his engagement was not dependent on the Teacher's Enthusiasm: I recognize a skillful teacher from his/her ability to get students to concentrate on the task at hand. Language lessons and materials are tough and require sustained energy. Thus, being proficient in the rules and vocabulary of a language is not sufficient for being a good teacher. An effective teacher can transmit happiness, energize learners, and inspire them to persevere. However, even if the teacher possesses such qualities, there is no guarantee that students will continue to work hard. For that, there must also be purposeful students who have a clear vision. ... who feel the need to work hard... and who understand the necessity to learn. It is too much to expect teachers to set such goals for learners.

4.2.2. The feeling of Confidence and Security

The feeling of confidence and security is believed to be an important facet of education. Many students believe that the teacher's behavior affects their level of security and confidence. Teachers who act enthusiastically help to reduce their students' inhibitions and self-defense mechanisms by creating a non-threatening and safe atmosphere. This encourages students to express themselves freely and participate in activities without fear of being embarrassed or criticized. Therefore, the level of engagement is improved.

Extract 2.

Teachers are scary. One of my previous teachers was strict, easily irritated, and unkind. Nobody would raise a hand as a volunteer. I seldom raised my hand. I can never remember his smile. However, this semester, our teacher entered the classroom with a big smile and looked kindly at the pupils. You feel eager to participate... I mean to get involved... to communicate and enjoy the company. You think if you stay aside, you will feel like you have missed something good. The sensation of safety creates a comfortable environment that motivates students to take risks with greater confidence, even in the face of potential mistakes. I would say I had a passionate instructor! My teacher was enthusiastic and exuded a sense of willingness. She is friendly, and energetic, and appears to genuinely enjoy her job and responsibilities. At times, it seemed as though she was more motivated or interested than any of us- the EFL learners. I witnessed that her positivity and energy activated the class and inspired learners to try new things and make mistakes without fear. She supported us in every situation, creating an environment where we could work without hesitation and energetically as well.

4.2.3. Excitement and Enjoyment

The statements of the respondents revealed that feelings of excitement and enjoyment were common during the interviews. Students from both groups expressed their excitement and pleasure at the enthusiasm displayed by their teachers. Excitement is an integral part of TE and has been consistently mentioned as the primary outcome of teacher effectiveness in the classroom. In this regard, another EFL learner's description is relevant:

Extract 3.

Whenever the teacher shows enthusiasm through his gestures, facial expressions, and verbal passion, I immediately notice that the whole class follows him with a high rate of excitement. Personally, in such cases, I start to enjoy the session greatly. The teacher delivers the lesson with such positive feelings and happiness that you develop the same emotions right away. Then, no matter what the subject is, even if it's grammar which we least like, you have fun and enjoy the process.

However, there were conflicting opinions about the impact of enjoyment generated by TE experiences on engagement. Some interviewees claimed that the feeling of excitement and enjoyment did not contribute significantly to their engagement. For instance, a female EFL learner with a high LE mean score suggested that enjoyment might not always be a precursor to her engagement. In the same vein, such perspective was further consolidated when another male EFL learner with a high perceived TE score confirmed that excitement or enjoyment did not necessarily lead to engagement with the material:

Extract 4.

I remember the occasions when my teacher's performance caused bunches of excitement. Frankly, I like that very much. Her emotional performance enthralls me greatly and I enjoy it. But I don't think that if her enthusiasm faded away, my engagement and motivation would follow it, and that's for sure! Irrespective of her mood and excitement, I stick to my own goals and plan. I am studying to prepare for the IELTS test, and this is the only important thing.

Extract 5.

I would say when my teacher teaches passionately, he pours his excitement and joy over us, as he becomes more funny! And I always enjoy it. Yes, it is fun and that's for sure... but sometimes, I just focus on his funny performance and enjoy it. However, if the stuff is not interesting or I consider it less relevant, I can hardly concentrate on it. For example, once he was passionate and funny and then assigned us to pairs to make up a conversation and perform it. Unfortunately, my partner did the whole thing and I just read my lines... Miserable me!

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the potential relationship between Iranian advanced EFL learners' perceived TE and their engagement in learning activities. The first research question focused on the connection between the two mentioned variables, and the statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between them. In other words, when EFL learners perceive their teachers' practice as enthusiastic, they tend and prefer to engage more in overall learning

activities. This finding can be corroborated by the manifestations of some previously conducted research studies (Burić et al., 2023; Burić & Moè, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Frenzel et al., 2019; Lazarides et al., 2021; Mercer, 2019; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021; Wang & Derakhshan, 2021; Xue, 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2023).

According to various studies, there is a strong link between the emotions and feelings of students and the emotions of their teachers. This is because teachers who are passionate and enthusiastic tend to exude positive emotions, which can be contagious and transmitted to their students. As a result, the classroom environment becomes more positive and engaging, and students are more likely to participate actively and interact with each other. This positive atmosphere also helps to reduce negative sensations such as unhappiness, boredom, anxiety, fear, and depression. Some other research studies (e.g., Becker et al., 2014; Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Philp & Duchesne, 2016) support this interpretation.

The second research question aimed to identify the potential underlying reasons or mechanisms that affect the connection between perceived TE and LE. Analysis of the qualitative data manifested three major themes mentioned by the respondents as salient issues in the association of TE and LE. The three following themes were identified in the research: 1) teacher quality evidence, 2) feeling of confidence and security, and 3) excitement and enjoyment.

The first theme suggests that the use of TE in the classroom brings positive emotions like joy, happiness, and elation to students. Respondents also believed that these emotional states are contagious and can be transmitted from enthusiastic teachers to students. This finding is consistent with the research of Becker et al. (2014), König (2020), Frenzel et al. (2009), Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021), Safdari (2022), who also emphasized the contagious nature of excitement and enjoyment. Besides, the present study showed that engagement in learning activities does not solely depend on the teacher's enjoyment and enthusiasm. While some respondents found enjoyment and pleasure in their teacher's enthusiastic approach, they also believed that their strong determination and previously set goals played a more significant role in keeping them engaged. This finding differs from several studies that have highlighted the significance of contagious pleasure and enjoyment in promoting engagement.

The second theme that emerged from the study was teacher quality evidence. The EFL learners interviewed believed that when a teacher shows enthusiasm, it is a sign of their quality or expertise. This belief is supported by Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021), who found that learners prefer happier ELT teachers and rate them positively. Similarly, Lazarides et al. (2021) agree that learners' perception of a teacher's expertise is a crucial factor when deciding about their instructional quality. Some of the respondents also highlighted the importance of determination and self-set goals. They expressed that without a clear purpose and vision, the teacher's enthusiasm alone may not be enough to motivate and inspire students to take action which has previously been highlighted by Safdari (2021). The significance of L2 learners' vision construction and its effectiveness in motivating them have already been cogently argued and evidenced (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014).

The third significant concept revolved around confidence and security. Teaching excellence is expected to subside negative emotions like fear or anxiety and ignite positive emotions like pleasure and enjoyment. According to the respondents, when they perceive enthusiasm in their instructors, they feel more confident and secure in the classroom. This, in turn, boosts their engagement and participation in class activities. These findings align with other studies such as Lazarides et al. (2019), Linnenbrink-Garcia et al. (2011), Philp and Duchesne (2016), and Safdari (2022).

Based on the qualitative data, the absence of negative emotions can cause greater involvement and engagement in the learning process. The qualitative data highlights two important points. Firstly, the themes emerging from the data reflect the emotional reactions and judgments of Iranian EFL learners towards their classroom learning experience in addition to their perceptions of their teachers' enthusiasm, regardless of whether these were positive or negative. Secondly, learners' perception of their teachers' enthusiasm had several consequences that influenced not only their emotional appraisal but also their judgment of the learning experience. The role of emotional appraisals has been observed in several research findings (e.g., Böheim et al., 2020; Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2017; Dao, 2021; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Larson et al., 2021; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2011; Safdari, 2022) as a mediator between perceived teacher effectiveness and learners' engagement. The studies

suggest that TE primarily affects learners' engagement, leading to emotional repercussions. These emotions, in turn, can significantly regulate and mediate the intersection of TE and LE. The second major issue is the importance of learners' determination and persistence, regardless of perceived TE. This new observation has important implications. It suggests that while perceived TE is effective in creating a positive and enjoyable classroom environment, other personal variables such as meaningful purposes, vision, and self-set goals may have a stronger and more lasting impact on learners. These variables go beyond transient emotions that are limited to the classroom context.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to probe into the relationship between teachers' perceived enthusiasm and advanced EFL learners' engagement in classroom activities. The results revealed that perceived TE is closely linked to, and influences, LE through stimulation and emotional arousal. Emotional outcomes of perceived enthusiasm, such as evaluation of teacher quality, feelings of confidence and security, and learners' excitement and enjoyment have an impact on their engagement. However, the findings suggested that there may be other factors that have a greater influence on LE, such as self-determined goals and personal aspirations.

The findings of this study revealed that ELT teachers' performance, enthusiasm, and behavior have a significant impact on EFL learners' evaluation of the quality of instruction. Teachers need to pay attention to the way they present themselves to their students to create a positive learning environment. Simply possessing knowledge and skills is not enough to gain the acceptance and trust of learners. Enjoyment, confidence, and a secure atmosphere are also essential ingredients for success; therefore, educators may choose to emphasize the importance of training novice teachers to understand the significance of enthusiasm as a pedagogical tool and learn how to communicate with the optimum level of passion and vitality. However, despite its importance, enthusiasm alone is not enough to ensure academic engagement. Personally important goals and self-determination are crucial for language learners. As a result, assisting them in creating a clearer personal vision and setting self-concordant aims can be highly effective and may even surpass the potential impact of other contextual factors, such as the teacher's enthusiasm.

Finally, the researchers suggest that L2 teachers pay attention to how they present themselves to create a positive learning environment for their students as possessing knowledge and skills is not sufficient to obtain the trust and acceptance of learners. Moreover, L2 learners' sense of engagement and community can be developed through collaborative coursework, discussion forums, and peer review assignments. This can help promote positive attitudes towards L2 teachers and L2 learning. To enhance L2 learners' self-efficacy, curriculum instructors and designers can use methods such as verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and performance accomplishments. This will make them feel more confident and motivated in the language class. Additionally, fulfilling L2 learners' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness through need-supportive teaching can be an effective way to arouse intrinsic value. At last, novice teachers should be trained to understand and communicate effectively using enthusiasm as a pedagogical tool.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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