



Loving Pedagogy and Second Language Learning: The Role of Teacherly Care, Motivation, and Anxiety in EFL Classrooms

Received: October 17, 2025

Revised: December 14, 2025

Accepted: December 18, 2025

Publish : December 22, 2025

Hossein Isaei*, Hamed Barjesteh, Mehdi Manoochehrzadeh

Abstract:

Background: Loving Pedagogy has gained increasing attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education as a relational and affective orientation emphasizing teacher care, empathy, and emotional responsiveness. Grounded in Positive Psychology, this perspective highlights how emotionally supportive teaching environments are associated with learners' motivation, self-beliefs, and language development.

Aims: This study examined the relationships between perceived Loving Pedagogy and EFL learners' language learning outcomes, focusing on the mediating roles of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, and the moderating role of foreign language anxiety.

Methods: A quantitative, correlational design was employed with 210 Iranian undergraduate EFL learners. Participants completed validated measures of Loving Pedagogy, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and foreign language anxiety. Language learning outcomes were operationalized using proficiency gain scores derived from pre-/post-administration of a standardized placement test. Data were analyzed using correlational analysis, hierarchical regression, and bootstrapped mediation and moderation procedures.

Results: Perceived Loving Pedagogy was positively associated with learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and language gain scores, and negatively with foreign language anxiety. Mediation analyses indicated that intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between Loving Pedagogy and language learning outcomes. Moderation analysis showed that higher levels of anxiety weakened these positive associations.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that Loving Pedagogy is meaningfully associated with EFL learners' motivational and affective experiences, resulting in language development. The study extends relational and positive psychology perspectives in SLA by empirically modeling how teacher care is linked to learning outcomes through affective-motivational pathways, while highlighting the importance of learner anxiety in emotionally responsive classrooms.

Keywords: EFL Learning Loving Pedagogy; Foreign Language Anxiety; Intrinsic Motivation; Self-Efficacy

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, second language acquisition (SLA) research has increasingly emphasized the affective and relational dimensions of teaching, recognizing that language learning is shaped not only by cognitive processes but also by emotional experiences and interpersonal dynamics (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

Within this perspective, classrooms are understood as social spaces in which learners' motivation, confidence, and emotional security interact with instructional practices to influence learning outcomes. As a result, growing attention has been directed toward pedagogical approaches that foreground care, empathy, and teacher-student relationships.

Loving Pedagogy has emerged as a conceptual framework that captures this relational orientation in education. Rooted in (Noddings, 2012) ethic of care, Loving Pedagogy refers to teachers' intentional commitment to compassion, responsiveness, and respect for learners' individuality. In EFL contexts, where learners often experience heightened vulnerability due to linguistic insecurity and fear of negative evaluation, caring teacher behaviors may be particularly salient. Prior research suggests that emotionally supportive teaching environments are associated with higher learner engagement, stronger motivation, and lower levels of anxiety (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024; Y. Wang et al., 2022). However, empirical work that connects learners' perceptions of loving pedagogy to measurable language learning outcomes remains limited.

Although Positive Psychology in SLA has highlighted the role of emotions such as enjoyment, confidence, and anxiety in language learning (Derakhshan & Pawlak, 2025; Dewaele & Li, 2020; Y. Wang & Derakhshan, 2023), much of the existing research has focused on isolated affective variables rather than on the relational foundations from which these experiences emerge. Studies frequently rely on cross-sectional self-report data and rarely integrate psychological constructs with objective indicators of language development. Consequently, the pathways through which teacher care

Publisher Note:

CV Media Inti Teknologi stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright

©20xx by the author(s).

Licensee CV Media Inti Teknologi, Bengkulu, Indonesia. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike (CCBY-SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).

is associated with learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and proficiency gains are not yet well specified.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a quantitative, correlational design to examine the relationships among perceived Loving Pedagogy, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, foreign language anxiety, and language learning outcomes in Iranian EFL classrooms. Language learning outcomes are operationalized using proficiency gain scores derived from standardized testing, allowing affective and motivational variables to be examined alongside measurable development in language ability. By modeling both mediating and moderating relationships, the study seeks to clarify how teacher care is linked to learning outcomes through affective–motivational processes.

Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent is Loving Pedagogy associated with learners' intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and language learning outcomes?

RQ2: To what extent do intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy mediate the relationship between Loving Pedagogy and language learning outcomes?

RQ3: Does foreign language anxiety moderate the relationships between Loving Pedagogy, motivational variables, and language learning outcomes?

By empirically examining these relationships, the study contributes to the growing body of research on relational and positive pedagogies in SLA. It advances understanding of how emotionally responsive teaching is associated with learners' psychological experiences and language development, while offering implications for teacher education and affect-sensitive instructional practices in EFL contexts.

The expanding body of research on affective dimensions of language education highlights how teachers' interpersonal behaviors shape learners' emotional, motivational, and cognitive engagement. Within this evolving landscape, the notion of teacher care has emerged as a central construct that links pedagogical practice with learner well-being and performance. Rather than focusing solely on instructional strategies or curriculum design (Barjesteh et al., 2025), recent scholarship emphasizes the relational foundation of effective teaching (the extent to which students perceive their instructors as genuinely empathetic, respectful, and supportive). This shift marks the beginning of what has been termed loving pedagogy, an orientation that places emotional connection and ethical responsiveness at the core of language education.

The concepts of love and care in education have deep philosophical roots, yet their systematic integration into second language learning research is relatively recent. The emergence of Positive Psychology in SLA has shifted scholarly focus toward affective constructs such

as enjoyment, engagement, and resilience, underscoring the centrality of emotions in language learning processes (Dewaele & Li, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2025). Within this paradigm, Loving Pedagogy represents a further evolution as an approach that situates the teacher's empathy, compassion, and ethical responsibility at the heart of instructional practice (Y. Wang & Derakhshan, 2023). Rather than viewing love as a personal sentiment, it is conceptualized as a pedagogical orientation that affirms learners' worth and nurtures their intellectual and emotional growth. Earlier educational theorists framed care as a moral and relational imperative. Noddings (2012) emphasized that caring is the foundation of authentic teaching, rooted in attentiveness and reciprocity. In language education, Mercer and Gkonou (2020) extended this perspective, describing care as a hallmark of effective instruction that sustains both learner motivation and teacher well-being. Similarly, Zhao & Li (2021) found that teachers who cultivate caring classroom relationships foster greater student engagement and long-term academic resilience. These insights collectively suggest that care-oriented teaching enhances not only emotional security but also linguistic progress.

Despite this growing recognition, affective and relational dimensions have often been overshadowed by performance-based paradigms that prioritize assessment and measurable proficiency (Barjesteh et al., 2025). Zhang et al. (2024) argue that embedding Loving Pedagogy within EFL instruction requires reimagining classrooms as communities of empathy and trust rather than competitive spaces. Such a shift can lower anxiety and promote intrinsic motivation, thereby creating a more favorable emotional climate for learning. This orientation resonates with (Krashen, 1992) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that emotional barriers, such as fear or stress, impede language acquisition. By lowering this affective filter through relational warmth, Loving Pedagogy provides the affective conditions in which motivation and self-efficacy can flourish.

The present review thus situates Loving Pedagogy within a broader affective–motivational framework, linking teacher care to learners' emotional states, motivational processes, and academic performance. The following subsections elaborate on this interconnection, beginning with the role of teacher care in language education and progressing toward the psychological constructs that mediate and moderate this relationship.

Teacher care, rooted in (Noddings, 2012) the ethic of care has been increasingly recognized as a pedagogical rather than purely moral construct. In EFL and ESL settings, it refers to behaviors that make students feel valued, supported, and emotionally secure (Y. Wang & Derakhshan, 2023). Studies demonstrate that perceived teacher care predicts higher engagement and lower attrition among L2 learners (Y. Wang & Derakhshan, 2023). In Chinese EFL contexts, Zhang et al. (2024) found that learners who perceived their teachers as

caring reported stronger willingness to communicate and more frequent use of English in and outside class. Similarly, in Iranian classrooms, [Isaee and Barjesteh \(2025\)](#) reported that teacher responsiveness and empathetic feedback significantly correlated with learners' motivation and task persistence. These findings align with [Mercer and Gkonou \(2020\)](#) argument that language learning is inherently relational: the affective quality of teacher–student interaction shapes not only participation but also learners' identities as legitimate L2 users.

While the concept of teacher care has long been associated with humanistic education, its systematic exploration within second language acquisition (SLA) gained momentum only after the rise of positive psychology. Researchers began to recognize that affective qualities such as empathy, kindness, and compassion are not peripheral but deeply intertwined with the social and cognitive processes of language learning. This shift from a purely instructional to an emotionally informed perspective created space for the emergence of loving pedagogy, a construct that integrates emotional well-being with pedagogical effectiveness.

The rise of Positive Psychology in SLA reframed affect as a resource for growth rather than merely a variable to control ([Mercer & Gregersen, 2020](#)). Building on [Fredrickson's \(2013\)](#) Broaden-and-build theory, loving pedagogy conceptualizes love as encompassing empathy, kindness, and compassion that broaden learners' cognitive scope and build enduring linguistic and psychological resources. Empirical work has begun to substantiate this claim. For instance, [Khajavy et al. \(2018\)](#) demonstrated that positive classroom emotions mediated the relationship between teacher support and students' actual L2 achievement scores over one academic semester. In Turkish EFL classes, [Arabai \(2020\)](#) conducted a quasi-experimental intervention showing that a teacher-support program designed around empathy and encouragement reduced foreign-language anxiety by 24 percent and increased mean oral-proficiency ratings by nearly half a CEFR band.

The principles of loving pedagogy align closely with established affective-motivational frameworks in language learning. Students' emotional experiences influence not only how they engage in classroom interaction but also how they regulate effort, confidence, and risk-taking in communication ([Mercer & Gkonou, 2020](#)). In this sense, the emotional resonance fostered by caring instruction can be viewed as a catalyst for motivational growth and efficacy development. Understanding how such affective climates shape cognitive and behavioral outcomes requires revisiting the classical constructs of motivation, self-efficacy, and the affective filter hypothesis.

Motivation and self-efficacy have long been central to explaining success in SLA ([Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021](#)). Teacher care interacts with these constructs by nurturing learners' belief in their ability and internalizing goals. [Noels et al. \(2000\)](#) demonstrated that autonomy-

supportive teacher behaviors predicted intrinsic motivation and self-determined regulation among Canadian L2 learners. In Iranian contexts, [Papi & Abdollahzadeh \(2012\)](#) found that students who rated their teachers as supportive reported stronger L2 motivational selves and higher persistence in communicative tasks. More recently, [Dörnyei \(2019\)](#) re-emphasized that motivation is socially co-constructed within caring classroom climates.

Parallel evidence concerns the reduction of negative affect. [Horwitz \(2010\)](#) first documented the debilitating role of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). Subsequent large-scale studies show that supportive teacher interaction moderates anxiety's impact on achievement. [Dewaele and Li \(2020\)](#), using data from 1,744 multilinguals, found that teacher care significantly predicted foreign-language enjoyment, which in turn negatively correlated with FLCA. Moreover, [Arabai \(2020\)](#) reported that perceived teacher empathy buffered anxiety and predicted greater oral participation in Chinese university English classes. Together, these findings position teacher care and loving pedagogy as emotional regulators that lower the affective filter ([Krashen, 1992](#)) and enable fuller participation in communicative acts.

Although theoretical connections between emotion, motivation, and learning are well established, empirical validation in EFL contexts remains uneven. Most prior studies have examined isolated variables (such as teacher support, motivation, or anxiety) without capturing their interaction within a single relational framework. Consequently, recent scholarship has turned toward integrative models that test how affective, motivational, and relational variables jointly influence learners' progress in real classrooms. These empirical studies form the foundation for understanding how loving pedagogy may operate as a measurable and transformative force in language education.

Empirical research on relational and affective pedagogy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts has grown substantially, reflecting increasing recognition that teacher–student relationships shape learners' emotional and motivational experiences.

Studies informed by Positive Psychology and interpersonal frameworks consistently indicate that caring, empathetic, and emotionally responsive teaching is associated with higher levels of learner engagement, enjoyment, and willingness to communicate, as well as lower levels of foreign language anxiety ([Fathi et al., 2021, 2023](#); [Mercer & Gregersen, 2023](#); [Zhang et al., 2024](#)). These findings suggest that teacher care functions as an important contextual resource that supports learners' emotional security in language classrooms.

Beyond affective outcomes, recent research has begun to examine motivational and self-belief mechanisms through which relational pedagogy may be linked to learning processes. For example, ([Khajavy et al., 2018](#)) demonstrated that teacher support was indirectly

associated with willingness to communicate through learners' motivation and perceived competence.

Similarly, [Li et al. \(2023\)](#) reported that a positive emotional classroom climate was associated with stronger self-confidence and higher self-reported proficiency among university EFL learners. Together, these studies indicate that caring pedagogical environments may influence learning outcomes primarily through motivational and efficacy-related pathways rather than through direct instructional effects alone.

Despite this growing body of evidence, several important limitations remain. First, much of the existing research is cross-sectional and relies heavily on self-report measures, restricting conclusions about how relational variables relate to actual language development over time. Second, relational constructs such as loving pedagogy are often examined independently of objective indicators of language achievement, leaving unanswered questions about whether emotionally supportive teaching is associated with measurable proficiency gains. Third, relatively few studies have integrated mediating variables (e.g., intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy) and moderating conditions (e.g., foreign language anxiety) within a single analytic framework. As a result, the mechanisms linking teacher care to language learning outcomes remain insufficiently specified.

Methodological gaps are also evident in the limited use of designs that account for naturally occurring variation in teacher behaviors across intact classrooms and for the nested structure of classroom data. In addition, sociocultural and institutional contexts may shape how caring behaviors are enacted and interpreted, suggesting the need for context-sensitive research in non-Western EFL settings. Addressing these issues requires quantitatively grounded studies that move beyond conceptual advocacy to empirically model how relational pedagogy is associated with learners' psychological experiences and language development.

In response to these gaps, the present study adopts an integrative correlational approach that examines perceived Loving Pedagogy alongside intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and foreign language anxiety, using language proficiency gain scores as an objective outcome measure. By modeling both mediating and moderating relationships within authentic classroom settings, the study seeks to clarify how loving pedagogy is linked to language learning outcomes through affective-motivational pathways, without assuming instructional manipulation or causal intervention.

The construct of Loving Pedagogy is conceptually anchored in three complementary traditions: the ethic of care ([Noddings, 2012](#)), positive psychology in SLA ([MacIntyre et al., 2019, 2025](#)), and motivational self-system theory ([Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021](#)). Together,

these frameworks elucidate the mechanisms through which caring teacher-student relationships may influence learners' motivation, reduce anxiety, and foster measurable language achievement.

[Noddings \(2012\)](#) described care as a relational encounter in which the teacher, as the one caring, is attentive to the cared-for. This responsiveness affirms the student's value and creates a moral context for learning grounded in trust and empathy. In language education, where communication is central, the ethic of care manifests through dialogic interaction, tolerance for error, and affirmation of learners' identities.

The relational nature of care makes it particularly relevant in EFL classrooms, where learners often experience vulnerability when expressing themselves in a non-native language ([Li et al., 2020](#)). Thus, the teacher's loving stance functions both as an ethical commitment and as an affective scaffold for cognitive engagement

Within the broader movement of positive psychology in SLA, [MacIntyre et al. \(2025\)](#) argue that positive emotions (joy, interest, gratitude, hope) expand learners' thought-action repertoires, enhancing creativity and linguistic experimentation. [Fredrickson \(2013\)](#) the broaden-and-build theory explains that positive affect widens attentional focus and builds enduring psychological and social resources.

A loving classroom climate, rich in encouragement and mutual respect, therefore generates emotional safety that allows learners to take communicative risks. Conversely, a lack of care can heighten anxiety and narrow learners' cognitive scope, reducing language output and comprehension.

The connection between care and achievement can also be theorized through motivation and self-efficacy. According to [Dörnyei \(2019\)](#), L2 Motivational Self System, learners who perceive teacher support are more likely to internalize goals and sustain effort. Teacher care communicates belief in students' capacity, which enhances their self-efficacy (the perception that they can succeed in language tasks). In turn, higher self-efficacy predicts persistence and improved performance. Parallel to these positive pathways, ([Krashen, 1992](#)) affective filter hypothesis suggests that anxiety can obstruct language input and acquisition. When teachers cultivate a loving environment, they effectively lower this filter, facilitating input processing and output production.

Synthesizing these perspectives, the study models Loving Pedagogy as a distal predictor of Language Learning Outcomes (LLO), operating partly through Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Efficacy (mediators), and moderated by Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). At the classroom level, aggregated teacher care may explain

variance in achievement beyond individual characteristics, indicating a systemic influence of relational pedagogy.

To visualize the theoretical relationships proposed in this research, Figure 1 presents the conceptual model underlying the study.

The model integrates emotional, motivational, and cognitive dimensions of language learning to depict how loving pedagogy operates as a systemic force influencing both psychological and linguistic outcomes. As illustrated in Figure 1, Loving Pedagogy serves as a

distal antecedent of Language Learning Outcomes (LLO), exerting both direct and indirect effects through learners' intrinsic motivation and Self-Efficacy.

FLA is positioned as a moderating variable that may attenuate or strengthen these pathways, reflecting the dynamic role of affect in learning contexts. The model also suggests that aggregated perceptions of teacher care at the classroom level can account for collective variance in achievement, highlighting that relational pedagogy extends beyond individual interactions to shape the overall classroom climate.

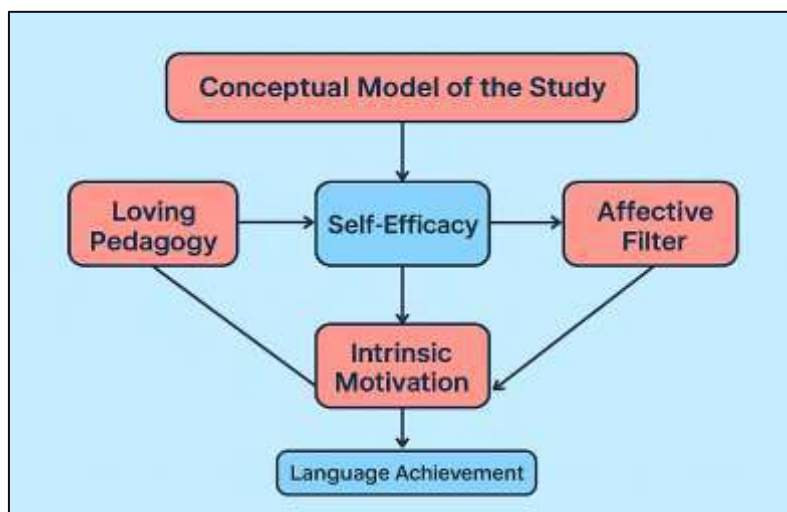


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

The proposed model synthesizes emotional, motivational, and cognitive dimensions of language learning to explain Loving Pedagogy as a systemic mechanism shaping both psychological and linguistic outcomes. As depicted in Figure 1, Loving Pedagogy operates as a distal predictor of Language Learning Outcomes (LLO), influencing achievement both directly and indirectly through learners' Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Efficacy.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is conceptualized as a moderating factor that may amplify or constrain these relationships, highlighting the dynamic and context-sensitive role of affect in language learning. Moreover, the model suggests that shared perceptions of teacher care at the classroom level account for collective variation in learner achievement, underscoring that relational pedagogy functions not only at the individual level but also in cultivating a supportive classroom climate.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationships among loving pedagogy, learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and language achievement in EFL classrooms. This design was chosen to allow for statistical testing of hypothesized associations and mediation pathways among the key affective and performance variables.

Data were collected through validated self-report instruments complemented by students' final course grades as an objective indicator of proficiency.

The study was conducted within a natural classroom setting, ensuring ecological validity while maintaining standardized procedures for instrument administration. By adopting a non-experimental, multivariate approach, the research sought to provide an empirically grounded account of how perceived teacher care and loving pedagogical practices contribute to language learning success.

The methodology integrated validated instruments, robust reliability checks, multilevel analytic modeling, and observational triangulation to ensure both depth and credibility. By capturing how Loving Pedagogy interacts with motivational and emotional factors to predict tangible language gains, this design provides a comprehensive empirical foundation for testing the theoretical assumptions developed earlier in the paper.

2.1 Participant

The participants were 210 undergraduate EFL learners (128 females and 82 males) enrolled in compulsory English courses at two public universities in northern Iran. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 years ($M = 20.9$, $SD = 1.8$). All participants were Persian native speakers whose English proficiency levels corresponded to the

B1–B2 range of the CEFR as verified by the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT). A stratified convenience sampling strategy was used to ensure diversity across proficiency levels and institutions. Six intact classes participated, each taught by a different instructor. The six EFL teachers (four females and two males) had 5–15 years of experience ($M = 9.6$) and held at least a master's degree in applied linguistics. None were informed of the study's specific hypotheses to minimize expectancy effects. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and all procedures were approved by the university's ethics committee.

2.2 Instruments

Five standardized and contextually validated instruments were employed. Each scale was translated and back-translated into Persian by two bilingual experts to ensure semantic equivalence.

a) The Loving Pedagogy Scale (LPS) was developed by (Y. Wang et al., 2022) measured teacher care across dimensions of kindness, compassion, and respect using 24 Likert-scale items ($\alpha = .93$).

b) Intrinsic Motivation was assessed via the Intrinsic Motivation Subscale of the Language Learning Orientations Scale (Noels et al., 2000), containing 12 items ($\alpha = .88$).

c) Self-efficacy was evaluated using the Language Learning Self-efficacy Questionnaire (LLSEQ) by (C. Wang, 2004) with 10 items ($\alpha = .87$).

d) Foreign Language Anxiety was measured by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), by (Horwitz, 2010), which includes 33 items ($\alpha = .91$).

e) Finally, Language Learning Outcome was operationalized as the gain score on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 1992), administered before and after instruction ($\alpha = .88$).

A pilot study with 30 non-participating students confirmed the clarity of wording and satisfactory reliabilities (all $\alpha > .85$).

The results of reliability analyses confirmed that all instruments possessed high internal consistency suitable for inferential testing. The broad coverage of affective, motivational, and proficiency-based variables allowed the study to capture both emotional and cognitive dimensions of language learning within a single analytic framework.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics and internal consistencies of the instruments.

Table 1. Reliability of Study Instruments

Instrument	No. of Items	Example Construct	Cronbach's α	Measurement Time
Loving Pedagogy Scale (LPS)	24	Compassion, kindness	.93	Mid-semester
Intrinsic Motivation Subscale	12	Enjoyment of learning	.88	Mid-semester
LL Self-Efficacy Questionnaire	10	Confidence in communication	.87	Mid-semester
FLCAS	33	Anxiety in language use	.91	Mid-semester
Oxford Quick Placement Test	60	Grammar, vocabulary, and reading	.88	Pre/Post

2.3 Procedure

The study took place over a sixteen-week semester. In Week 1, students completed the QPT pre-test and a brief demographic form. Over the next 14 weeks, instruction followed the existing communicative syllabus; no experimental treatment was imposed, allowing natural variation in teacher care to emerge. Accordingly, variation in Loving Pedagogy reflects naturally occurring differences in perceived teacher care rather than instructional manipulation. During Week 8, the four affective–motivational questionnaires were administered in class (20 minutes). The same instruments were re-administered at Week 16 after the

QPT post-test to assess temporal stability. To supplement self-reports, two brief classroom observations per class were conducted by trained observers, focusing on teacher responsiveness, individualized feedback, and emotional tone. These notes served for qualitative triangulation but were not statistically analyzed.

Additionally, Data screening showed minimal missing values ($< 3\%$) and no extreme outliers. Assumption checks confirmed approximate normality ($|\text{skewness}|, |\text{kurtosis}| < 1$), linearity, and acceptable homogeneity of variances across classes. To clarify the relationships examined in the present study, a conceptual model was

developed to illustrate the hypothesized pathways among the major constructs.

As depicted in Figure 2, Loving Pedagogy is posited to exert a direct positive influence on learners' motivation and self-efficacy, which in turn are expected to enhance language achievement.

The model also assumes that Loving Pedagogy indirectly affects achievement by lowering the Affective Filter, thereby facilitating more effective engagement and performance. This framework guided the selection of instruments, data analysis procedures, and interpretation of results.

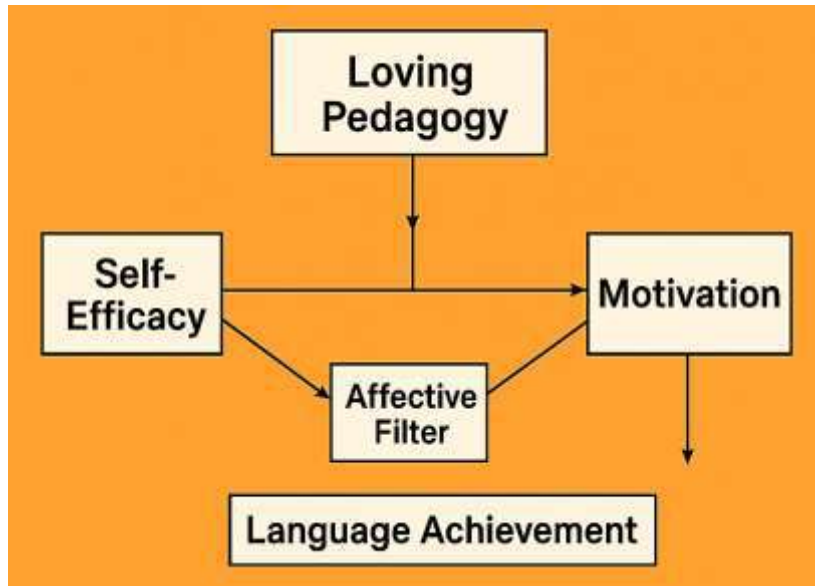


Figure 2. Hypothesized Path Model

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch (Approval No. 2025-021 Date: 2025, Jan.24). All participants provided written informed consent before taking part in the research.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. The Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, waived the requirement for formal ethics approval as the study involved an anonymous survey with no identifiable personal data.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 29 and AMOS 28. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analyses were first conducted using SPSS to examine

relationships among the study variables. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with observed variables was then performed in AMOS to test the hypothesized mediation model, examining the indirect roles of Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Efficacy in the association between Loving Pedagogy and Language Learning Outcome. Bootstrapping procedures were applied to estimate the significance of indirect effects. In addition, a moderation analysis was conducted within the SEM framework to examine whether Foreign Language Anxiety moderated the relationship between Loving Pedagogy and Language Learning Outcome. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables. Learners reported relatively high perceptions of Loving Pedagogy and moderate levels of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, alongside mid-range foreign language anxiety. All measures demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .87$).

Table 2. Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Loving Pedagogy	3.97	0.56	—				
2. Intrinsic Motivation	3.81	0.63	.61***	—			
3. Self-Efficacy	3.74	0.58	.54***	.57***	—		
4. Anxiety	2.96	0.71	-.49***	-.46***	-.42***	—	
5. Language Gain	6.42	2.31	.39***	.44***	.36***	-.33***	—

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This section presents the statistical findings of the study in three parts:

- (a) descriptive statistics of the measured variables,
- (b) correlation analysis to examine bivariate relationships, and
- (c) regression and mediation analysis.

3.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Before testing the hypothesized relationships, descriptive statistics were computed to examine the general distribution and central tendencies of the study variables. Table 3 displays the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis indices for Loving Pedagogy, Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Foreign Language Anxiety, and Language Achievement.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Major Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Loving Pedagogy	3.92	0.56	-0.42	-0.12	2.35	4.95
Motivation	3.78	0.61	-0.36	-0.18	2.10	4.90
Self-Efficacy	3.85	0.59	-0.27	-0.25	2.15	4.85
Foreign Language Anxiety	2.61	0.67	0.31	-0.44	1.30	4.30
Language Achievement	81.47	7.84	-0.16	-0.57	61.00	96.00

As shown in Table 3, all variables showed approximately normal distributions, with skewness and

3.1.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson’s correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the study variables. In

kurtosis values within ± 1 , meeting the assumptions for parametric analysis.

this regard, Table 4 summarizes the correlation matrix Among Major Variables, as follows.

Table 4. Pearson Correlations Among Major Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Loving Pedagogy	—				
2. Motivation	.62**	—			
3. Self-Efficacy	.58**	.64**	—		
4. Foreign Language Anxiety	-.49**	-.53**	-.56**	—	
5. Language Achievement	.46**	.51**	.54**	-.44**	—

**Note. All coefficients are Pearson correlations.

As indicated in Table 4, Loving Pedagogy correlated positively and significantly with Motivation ($r = .62, p < .01$), Self-Efficacy ($r = .58, p < .01$), and Language Achievement ($r = .46, p < .01$), while it correlated negatively with Foreign Language Anxiety ($r = -.49, p < .01$).

Correlational analyses revealed that Loving Pedagogy was positively associated with motivational and efficacy variables and negatively associated with foreign language anxiety. In addition, anxiety was negatively correlated with language proficiency gains. These associations informed the subsequent structural equation modeling analyses.

3.1.3 Regression and Mediation Analysis

To examine the hypothesized relationships, a series of multiple regression analyses was conducted, followed by bootstrapped mediation analyses using 5,000 resamples. The analyses examined whether Motivation and Self-Efficacy mediated the relationship between Loving Pedagogy and Language Achievement, with Foreign Language Anxiety as a potential moderator.

Table 5 summarizes the regression analyses predicting Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Language Achievement. Accordingly, Loving Pedagogy was a significant predictor of intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .62, p < .001$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = .41, p < .001$).

Table 5. Regression Analyses Predicting Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Achievement

Dependent Variable	Predictor	β	t	p	R^2
Motivation	Loving Pedagogy	.62	10.84	< .001	.38
Self-Efficacy	Loving Pedagogy	.41	7.56	< .001	.29
Language Achievement	Loving Pedagogy	.18	3.22	.001	—
	Motivation	.29	4.57	< .001	.46
	Self-Efficacy	.33	5.12	< .001	—
	Foreign Language Anxiety	-.25	-4.06	< .001	—

In the regression model predicting language achievement, Loving Pedagogy, motivation, self-efficacy, and foreign language anxiety were statistically significant predictors.

Figure 3 presents the tested mediation model illustrating the associations among Loving Pedagogy, motivational variables, foreign language anxiety, and language achievement

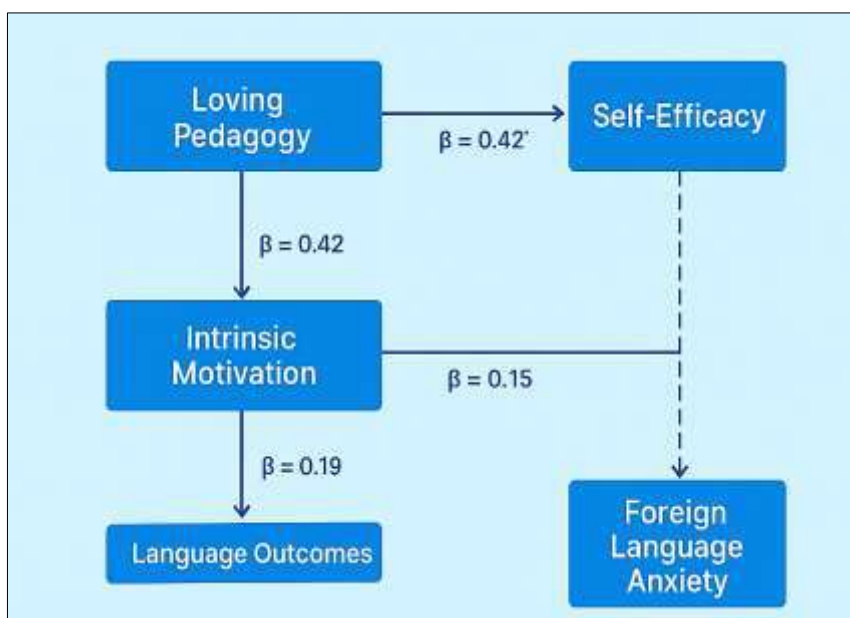


Figure 3. The associations among variables

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Implications

The findings of the present study carry several important pedagogical implications for EFL instruction in higher education contexts. The observed associations between perceived Loving Pedagogy and learners’ intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, reduced foreign language anxiety, and language proficiency gains underscore the significance of emotionally responsive teacher–student relationships in fostering effective language learning environments. These results suggest that teacher care is not merely an ethical or interpersonal ideal but a pedagogically consequential factor linked to learners’ motivational resources and emotional well-being, which in turn relate to language development.

From a practical perspective, the results indicate that teachers who demonstrate empathy, respect, and genuine concern for learners may help create classroom climates that support learners’ confidence and willingness to engage with the target language. Such

environments may be particularly valuable in EFL settings where anxiety and self-doubt are prevalent. Accordingly, teacher education and professional development programs may benefit from explicitly incorporating relational and affective competencies alongside methodological and linguistic training (Isaee & Barjesteh, 2023). Emphasizing Loving Pedagogy as a relational orientation can help teachers recognize the role of emotional support in sustaining learner motivation and facilitating meaningful language use.

3.2.2 Research Contributions

This study contributes to the growing body of research in second language acquisition and Positive Psychology by foregrounding Loving Pedagogy as a contextual and relational construct rather than treating affective variables solely as individual learner traits. While prior research has documented the importance of emotions such as enjoyment, grit, and resilience (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024; Dewaele & Li, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2025), these studies have often examined such variables in isolation from the pedagogical relationships in which

they are embedded. The present study extends this literature by positioning teacher care as a meaningful contextual factor associated with learners' motivational beliefs, emotional experiences, and language outcomes.

Moreover, the use of mediation analyses advances theoretical understanding of the mechanisms through which Loving Pedagogy is linked to language achievement. By demonstrating that intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy partially mediate the relationship between perceived teacher care and proficiency gains, the study provides empirical support for models that conceptualize language learning as a socially situated process. The inclusion of proficiency gain scores, rather than reliance on self-reported outcomes alone, further strengthens the contribution of this research by linking relational and motivational variables to measurable language development.

3.2.3 Limitations

Despite its contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the correlational design of the study does not allow for causal conclusions regarding the direction of the observed relationships. Although the findings are theoretically grounded, longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to determine whether Loving Pedagogy directly leads to changes in motivation, anxiety, and proficiency over time.

Second, while proficiency gain scores offer a more objective indicator than self-report measures, future studies could incorporate a broader range of performance-based assessments to capture different dimensions of language ability. Third, the study relied on learners' perceptions of Loving Pedagogy, which may be influenced by cultural norms and contextual expectations within the Iranian university setting. As a result, caution is warranted when generalizing the findings to other educational or cultural contexts.

3.2.4 Suggestions

Building on the present findings, future research could adopt longitudinal or intervention-based designs to examine how changes in teachers' relational practices influence learners' motivation, emotions, and language development over time. Experimental studies that explicitly train teachers in Loving Pedagogy-oriented practices would be particularly valuable in establishing causal pathways.

Additionally, future studies may explore other potential mediating or moderating variables, such as classroom engagement, learner persistence, or peer relationships, to further clarify the mechanisms through which teacher care is associated with language learning outcomes. Cross-cultural research is also recommended to investigate how Loving Pedagogy is perceived and enacted in diverse EFL and ESL contexts. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive and globally relevant understanding of the role of relational pedagogy in second language learning.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the associations between perceived Loving Pedagogy and EFL learners' motivational, emotional, and linguistic outcomes within an Iranian university context. Drawing on a quantitative, correlational design, the findings indicate that learners who perceived higher levels of teacher care also reported stronger intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, lower levels of foreign language anxiety, and greater language proficiency gains. Together, these results underscore the central role of relational and affective dimensions of teaching in shaping learners' psychological experiences and their engagement with language learning.

By modeling motivational and emotional variables alongside proficiency gain scores, the study extends existing research on Positive Psychology and relational pedagogy in SLA. Specifically, the findings suggest that Loving Pedagogy is meaningfully associated with language learning outcomes through affective-motivational pathways rather than through direct instructional influence. Intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy emerged as key psychological mechanisms linking perceived teacher care to language development, while foreign language anxiety functioned as an emotional condition that shaped the strength of these associations.

Importantly, the study contributes to the literature by empirically integrating relational pedagogy with objective indicators of language development. Whereas much prior research has relied primarily on cross-sectional self-report data, the use of gain scores provides additional insight into how learners' emotional and motivational experiences are associated with measurable progress in language proficiency. Moreover, by situating foreign language anxiety within this relational framework, the study offers a nuanced perspective on how emotional barriers may constrain learning processes in EFL classrooms.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The correlational design precludes causal inference, and future research employing longitudinal or experimental approaches is needed to clarify the directionality of the observed relationships. In addition, although the study was conducted within a specific cultural and institutional context, further research across diverse EFL settings would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the range of outcome measures and incorporating classroom-based observations could also enrich understanding of how Loving Pedagogy is enacted and perceived.

Despite these limitations, the findings carry meaningful implications for EFL pedagogy and teacher education. They suggest that fostering caring, empathetic, and emotionally responsive classroom environments is associated with learners' motivational resources and emotional well-being, which are in turn linked to language development. As such, teacher education

programs may benefit from greater attention to relational and affective competencies alongside methodological training. By foregrounding Loving Pedagogy as a relational construct embedded in everyday classroom interactions, this study contributes to a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of humanistic and emotionally attuned approaches to language education.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We sincerely thank all the editors, managers, and reviewers of *the Indonesian Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education* for their insightful comments and guidance. In addition, we would like to thank the participants for contributing to this study.

6. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Conceptualization, H.I.; methodology, H.B.; software, M.M.; validation, H.B.; formal analysis, M.M.; investigation, H.I.; resources, H.I.; data curation, H.I.; writing—original draft preparation, H.I.; writing—review and editing, M.M.; visualization, H.B.; supervision, H.B.; project administration, H.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Author

Hossein Isaee, Department of English Language and Literature, Am.C., Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran, Country

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9028-2907>

Email: hossein_isaee@yahoo.com


Authors

Hamed Barjesteh, Department of English Language and Literature, Am.C., Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4018-4487>

Email: Hamed.Barjesteh@iau.ac.ir

Mehdi Manoochehrzadeh, Zerodale Inc. Centre for Research in Entrepreneurship Education and Development, Toronto, Canada

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0381-7250>

Email: manoochehrzadeh@zerodale.com

REFERENCE

Alrabai, F. (2020). The notion of emotion in EFL learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia: A critical review of 20 years of research. *Arab World English Journal*, 11. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3764217

- Barjesteh, H., Vijayaratnam, P., Fatehi Rad, N., Golkar Rafsanjani, M., Isaee, H., & Gholipour, H. (2025). Unraveling the Drivers of Teacher Exhaustion in Language Education: A Deep Dive into Internal and External Factors. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 7(3), 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8338>
- Derakhshan, A., & Fathi, J. (2024). Longitudinal exploration of interconnectedness through a cross-lagged panel design. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2393705>
- Derakhshan, A., & Pawlak, M. (2025). An introduction to the special issue on innovative research approaches in the study of foreign language teachers' and learners' academic emotions. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2025.2467342>
- Dewaele, J. M., & Li, C. (2020). Emotions in second language acquisition: A critical review and research agenda. *Foreign Language World*, 196(1), 34–49. <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/32797/3/32797.pdf>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2019). Towards a better understanding of the L2 learning experience. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(1), 19–30.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351006743>
- Fathi, J., Derakhshan, A., & Ebrahimi Galedar, D. (2023). Teacher self-efficacy and academic optimism: A structural equation modeling approach. *Language and Translation Studies*, 55(4), 33–63. <https://doi.org/10.22067/jlts.2021.71751.1060>
- Fathi, J., Greenier, V., & Derakhshan, A. (2021). Self-efficacy, reflection, and burnout among Iranian EFL teachers. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 9(2), 13–37. <https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2021.121043>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Positive emotions broaden and build. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 47, pp. 1–53). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00001-2>
- Horwitz, E. K. (2010). Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching*, 43(2), 154–167. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480999036X>
- Isaee, H., & Barjesteh, H. (2023). EFL teachers' professional development needs. *Journal of Studies in Learning and Teaching English*, 12(2), 45–56. <https://jslte.shiraz.iau.ir/>
- Isaee, H., & Barjesteh, H. (2025). Screening EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Emergency Remote Teaching During the COVID-

- 19 Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis. In *Human Arenas* (Vol. 8, Issue 2). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-023-00353-7>
- Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P. D., & Barabadi, E. (2018). Role of emotions and classroom environment in willingness to communicate. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 40(3), 605–624. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000304>
- Krashen, S. D. (1992). *The Input Hypothesis: An Update*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, C., Dewaele, J.-M., & Hu, Y. (2023). Foreign language learning boredom. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 14(2), 223–249. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2020-0124>
- Li, C., Dewaele, J.-M., & Jiang, G. (2020). The complex relationship between classroom emotions and EFL achievement in China. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 11(3), 485–510. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2018-0043>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2019). Setting an agenda for positive psychology in SLA. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(1), 262–274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12544>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Panahi, A., & Mohebbi, H. (2025). Peter D. MacIntyre's 35-year research contribution to psychology, language education, and communication. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 48, 297–336. <https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2025.48.18>
- Mercer, S., & Gkonou, C. (2020). Relationships and good language teachers. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Teachers* (pp. 164–178). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108774390.016>
- Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T. (2020). *Teacher Wellbeing*. Oxford University Press.
- Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T. (2023). Transformative positive psychology in the acquisition of additional languages. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2194869>
- Noddings, N. (2012). The caring relation in teaching. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(6), 771–781. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.745047>
- Noels, K. A., Pelletier, L. G., Clément, R., & Vallerand, R. J. (2000). Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning*, 50(1), 57–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00111>
- Papi, M., & Abdollahzadeh, E. (2012). Teacher motivational practice, student motivation, and possible L2 selves. *Language Learning*, 62(2), 571–594. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00632.x>
- Wang, C. (2004). *Self-regulated learning strategies and self-efficacy beliefs of children learning English as a second language*. The Ohio State University. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1091546670
- Wang, Y., & Derakhshan, A. (2023). Teacher confirmation and caring as predictors of Chinese and Iranian EFL students' willingness to attend EFL classes. *Porta Linguarum*, 39, 165–192. <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi39.23625>
- Wang, Y., Derakhshan, A., & Pan, Z. (2022). Positioning an agenda on a loving pedagogy in SLA. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 894190. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.894190>
- Zhang, Q., Song, Y., & Zhao, C. (2024). Foreign language enjoyment and willingness to communicate. *System*, 125, 103346. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103346>
- Zhao, S., & Li, M. (2021). Reflection on loving pedagogy and students' engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 757697. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.757697>