

On the relationship between EFL teachers' interpersonal variables and their students' mental health and willingness to communicate

YAO YAO

School of Marxism, Soochow University, Suzhou, China

Received: 2023-11-04 /Accepted: 2024-05-15

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi43.29348>

ISSN paper edition: 1697-7467, ISSN digital edition: 2695-8244

ABSTRACT: This research investigated the relationship between teachers' interpersonal variables and EFL students' willingness to communicate and their mental health. The statistical population of the research was 301 students in different grades and universities. In order to collect the required data, the researchers used standard mental health, willingness to communicate, and teachers' interaction questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed by SEM statistical analyses to investigate the relationship between the variables. The findings showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between teachers' interpersonal variables and EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health. Interpersonal variables of teachers predict 73% of changes in students' willingness to communicate and 63% of changes in students' mental health. The findings of the study emphasized that EFL teachers' immediacy behaviors empower students, leading to sustained attention and increased interpersonal interaction. This positively influences students' mental health and willingness to communicate. In addition, language learners' willingness to communicate is influenced by communication apprehension, self-perceived competence, and emotional intelligence. These factors play a role in shaping the dynamics between teachers and students, impacting mental health and communication willingness. These findings have significant pedagogical implications in an EFL setting. EFL teachers utilize interpersonal projection as a discourse strategy to enhance students' willingness to communicate. This perspective aligns with a systemic-functional approach, emphasizing the impact of teacher communication on student engagement. The relationship between EFL learners' emotional intelligence and their willingness to communicate is significant. Teachers should focus on emotional intelligence correlated with communication dynamics, influencing students' openness to engage in language learning activities.

Keywords: teachers' interpersonal variables, willingness to communicate, mental health, teacher education, teacher development

Sobre la relación entre las variables interpersonales de los profesores y la salud mental y la voluntad de comunicarse de los estudiantes

RESUMEN: Esta investigación investigó la relación entre las variables interpersonales de los profesores y la disposición a comunicarse de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés) y su salud mental. La población estadística de la investigación fue de 301 estudiantes de diferentes grados y universidades. Para recopilar los datos necesarios, los investigadores utilizaron cuestionarios estándar de salud mental, disposición a comunicarse e interacción de profesores. Los datos recopilados fueron analizados

mediante análisis estadísticos SEM para investigar la relación entre las variables. Los hallazgos mostraron que había una relación positiva y significativa entre las variables interpersonales de los profesores y la disposición a comunicarse y la salud mental de los estudiantes de EFL. Las variables interpersonales de los profesores predicen el 73% de los cambios en la disposición a comunicarse de los estudiantes y el 63% de los cambios en la salud mental de los estudiantes. Los resultados del estudio enfatizaron que los comportamientos de inmediatez de los profesores de EFL empoderan a los estudiantes, lo que lleva a una atención sostenida e interacción interpersonal aumentada. Esto influye positivamente en la salud mental y la disposición a comunicarse de los estudiantes. Además, la disposición a comunicarse de los aprendices de idiomas está influenciada por la aprensión comunicativa, la competencia autopercebida y la inteligencia emocional. Estos factores juegan un papel en la formación de la dinámica entre profesores y estudiantes, impactando en la salud mental y la disposición a comunicarse. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones pedagógicas significativas en un entorno de EFL. Los profesores de EFL utilizan la proyección interpersonal como estrategia discursiva para mejorar la disposición a comunicarse de los estudiantes. Esta perspectiva se alinea con un enfoque sistémico-funcional, enfatizando el impacto de la comunicación del profesor en la participación del estudiante. La relación entre la inteligencia emocional de los aprendices de EFL y su disposición a comunicarse es significativa. Los profesores deben centrarse en la inteligencia emocional correlacionada con la dinámica de la comunicación, influyendo en la disposición de los estudiantes a participar en actividades de aprendizaje de idiomas.

Palabras clave: variables interpersonales de los profesores, disposición a comunicarse, salud mental, educación de profesores, desarrollo de profesores

1. INTRODUCTION

Human communication and effective interpersonal relationships are the basis and foundation of human identity and perfection (Al-Murtadha, 2019). It forms the primary basis of human connection with others, and they make people flourish and improve the quality of their relationships (Bilican, 2013). Many psychological disorders are associated with a lack of social and communication skills, and those who are hospitalized due to various mental illnesses show major deficiencies in communication skills (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Wondie & Abawa, 2019). Educational organizations such as the social systems of schools and universities usually are the most central establishments in societies (Allen et al., 2006; Berg et al., 2023). However, education has no meaning without creating efficient relationships (Alavi et al., 2022; Bilican, 2013; Greenier et al., 2021). One of the most important abilities of a teacher as a personality influencing the fate of people is to establish a close and effective relationship with students (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022). We all have fond memories of teachers who had good communication skills (Wondie & Abawa, 2019). The relationship between a student and a teacher is the best kind of human relationship that both of them will experience in their lifetime (Evans et al., 2019). Class interactions can happen between teachers and students or between students. The results of the latest studies show that the EFL students' relationship with the school is related to the student's class participation and thus to their academic progress (Michos et al., 2022). Student-teacher relationships play an important role in teachers and students experiences in education and have been found to be related to learning, classroom management, and student absenteeism (Derakhshan et al., 2023; Wang & Derakhshan, 2023). As a result, this two-way communication can play an important role in strengthening the student-school bond and provide a valuable basis for the

realization of collaborative learning (Collie et al., 2019). Emotional factors resulting from a good relationship between students and teachers have a tremendous impact on EFL students' participation, which leads to the improvement of their relationship and attitude towards teachers, school, and learning. Perceived relationships with teachers and classmates are also related to perceptions in the classroom (De Loof et al., 2021; Frenzel et al., 2021; García-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Teacher communication, student communication, and class communication collectively increase student participation. As a result, teachers' communication is considered a predictor of participation, emotional learning, and cognitive learning (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014; Misbah et al., 2015; Misbah et al., 2022; Pekrun, 2021).

Although the educational system offers students the opportunity to expand their search for competence and skills, new expectations and expectations emerge from students in educational environments (Greenier et al., 2021). Despite the fact that learning new information can be exciting for most students, in the case of some students, it can cause disability and deprivation and lead to the failure of self-confidence and destruction of their personality (Henry & Thorsen, 2018). Behavioral and emotional problems are one of the influencing factors in EFL students' willingness to communicate and their academic quality (Kim, 2021; Mellati & Khademi, 2019). The conducted studies indicate that these issues can have harmful effects on the physical and psychological health of students (Lee, 2020). In fact, there is a correlation between the number of everyday problems that students experience and the symptoms of health problems and psychological and physiological tensions (Liu et al., 2021). Scientists believe that when the tension caused by everyday issues is severe or when students perceive any tension negatively for various reasons, the health and performance of students (especially academic performance) is affected (Denies et al., 2015; Naal et al., 2022).

Various researchers have estimated that between 10-20% of students have emotional and behavioral problems (Aspfors & Bondas, 2013; Burke-Smalley, 2018; Chow et al., 2018; Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Peng, 2020; Pishghadam et al., 2021). The teacher should behave in such a way that the lazy and the strong, the poor and the rich all think that the teacher has come to the classroom for each of them (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020). Today, many students are complaining about this and everyone is shouting that our teachers don't understand us. In other words, they say that we want teachers to touch our entire spiritual existence and not to be content with teaching (Berg et al., 2023). Teachers in the school environment can help students the most by presenting the correct and logical values of adults. Giving appropriate positive rewards, introducing and providing correct moral and educational models to imitate and helping them find satisfaction and satisfaction at school are of particular importance. Because students often come to school with inappropriate internal controls and unfavorable socialization (Finch et al., 2023). Finally, we have to accept that the responsibility of teachers is not limited to cultivating intellectual abilities and introducing students to cognitive, social, and moral values, but they are also responsible for changing and correcting incompatible behaviors and ensuring the intellectual maturity and mental health of students (Lazarides et al., 2023; Oppermann & Lazarides, 2021; Schwarzenenthal et al., 2023; Wettstein et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2023).

Research findings showed that there is a significant negative relationship between teachers' communication skills and EFL students' stress. Also, there is a significant negative relationship between each of the four main components of teachers' communication skills and

EFL students' stress (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Hiver et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Numerous pieces of research show that one out of every two students has some kind of mental health problem, which unfortunately, due to the lack of follow-up and necessary interventions, such disorders remain until obtaining higher education degrees and even entering society (Denies et al., 2015; Derakhshan et al., 2020; Ebrahimi Ghassemi, 2018; Greenier et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2022). Separation anxiety, stress, fear of school, obsession and all kinds of ties, normal disorders such as nail biting, pulling or pulling hair, lack of attention and emotional and mood disorders (depression), mental and learning problems are among the most important and common disorders of students (Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Kim, 2021; Lee, 2020).

Based on the existing research background, students who have the desire to communicate participate in all academic and non-academic school activities, have good relationships with teachers and other students, have many friends, and value the consequences of school and education. In contrast, students who don't want to communicate believe that the educational and non-educational experiences of the school have nothing to do with future success. These students do not involve themselves in academic and non-academic activities of school and class, they do not feel satisfied with attending school, feel bored, and gradually withdraw from the school atmosphere (Liu et al., 2021; Naal et al., 2022; Oubibi et al., 2023; Peng, 2020; Pishghadam et al., 2023; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

Since students spend most of their study time with teachers, what forms the basis of the interaction is the relationship that teachers establish with their students (Chaharbashloo et al., 2020; Denies et al., 2015). The emotional factors resulting from a good teacher-students interaction have a tremendous effect on the EFL students' participation, which leads to the improvement of their interactions and attitude towards the teacher, learning environments, and learning outcomes (Al-Murtadha, 2019). In addition, the perceived teacher-students interactions is related to classroom perception (Burke-Smalley, 2018). Teacher communication, student communication, and class communication collectively increase student participation. As a result, teacher communication is considered as a predictor of participation, emotional learning, and cognitive learning (Chow et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2019).

Therefore, considering the importance of willingness to communicate in educational environments that have experienced complex changes and developments, the scientific investigation of the factors affecting EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health in these environments has become doubly important (Bilican, 2013; Burke-Smalley, 2018; Gupta et al., 2022; Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Lee, 2020; Wondie & Abawa, 2019). The review of previous research shows that the formation of strong emotional bonds between students and teachers can increase the motivation of students to participate in school activities (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Denies et al., 2015; Derakhshan et al., 2021; Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021; Ebrahimi Ghassemi, 2018; Evans et al., 2019; Greenier et al., 2021). In the meantime, teachers are known as the most important people in learning contexts as the people who have the most interaction with the students and play a significant role in increasing the EFL students' interest in the school and their participation in the classroom (Gupta et al., 2022; Oubibi et al., 2023). However, no comprehensive research have been conducted that examines the relationship between mental health variables, willingness to communicate and teacher-students interactions. For this purpose, the current research was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between the interpersonal variables of teachers, mental health, and EFL students' willingness to communicate.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

Reviewing the literature, the researchers raised the following research question and hypotheses.

- RQ.** How much variance in the Chinese EFL students' mental health and willingness to communicate can be predicted by their teachers' interpersonal variables?
- NH1.** There are no significant differences between Chinese EFL students' willingness to communicate and teacher-student rapport.
- NH2.** There are no significant differences between Chinese EFL students' willingness to communicate and teachers' verbal immediacy.
- NH3.** There are no significant differences between Chinese EFL students' willingness to communicate and teachers' non-verbal immediacy.
- NH4.** There are no significant differences between Chinese EFL students' mental health and teacher-student rapport.
- NH5.** There are no significant differences between Chinese EFL students' mental health and teachers' verbal immediacy.
- NH6.** There are no significant differences between Chinese EFL students' mental health and teachers' non-verbal immediacy.

3. METHOD

3.1 Participants

The researchers invited 350 EFL students to participate in the study. Out of those 350, this study received 301 questionnaires, all of which were valid. Of the total 301 participants, 15 were male and 286 were female, accounting for 4.98% and 95.02% respectively. Participants were in business English, tourism English, preschool education and other majors, of which business English majors accounted for the largest proportion (98.32%). The age range of participants was 18-40, with an average age of 19.35. 98.01% of the participants were B.The students,0.66% were M.A and 1.33% were Ph.D. The questionnaires complied with the basic research ethics. Participants were aware of their rights in participating in the study. They had been informed that the information they filled in would be completely confidential and used for research purposes only. There was no previous contact between researchers and participants and no conflict of interest. The collected data had been carefully checked and cleaned to ensure authenticity and reliability of the data.

3.2 Instruments

To gather the necessary information, the analysts utilized the accompanying instruments:

3.2.1 *Willingness to Communicate Survey*

The Willingness to Communicate survey adopted from McCroskey and Richmond (1987) has 10 Likert scale items. The questionnaire measures the EFL students' attitude toward beginning or finishing correspondence. The Likert scale begins from 1 (Definitely not willing) to 7 (Definitely willing). The researchers conducted Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient to check its reliability; the index was .79 ($r = .79$).

3.2.2 *Teacher Interaction Survey*

The adopted survey has 60 items that quantify perceptions of teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediate behaviors and measure EFL students' attitudes toward teachers on a 5-point Likert scale. To check the dependability of the poll, the scientists directed Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The index of this test was .87 ($r = .87$).

3.2.3 *Mental Health Questionnaire*

A validated 23-question mental health scale was used to check mental health. This test has 23 questions that include four subscales, each subscale has seven questions. The first subscale includes items about how people feel about their health status and their fatigue and physical symptoms. This subscale evaluates bodily sensory inputs that are often associated with emotional arousal. The second subscale includes items related to anxiety and insomnia, which includes seven other questions in the questionnaire. The third subscale measures the extent of someone's ability to deal with the demands and problems of daily life and reveals their feelings about how to cope with common life situations. And finally, the fourth subscale includes items that are related to severe depression and suicidal tendencies, and this component also allocates seven more questions of the questionnaire. The scientists directed Cronbach Alpha Coefficient to check its reliability; the index was .76 ($r = .76$).

4. PROCEDURE

The researchers invited the participants by sending them the questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to 350 EFL students at different levels and at different universities. The participants were informed on the purpose of the study before sending the questionnaires. Out of those 350, this study received 301 questionnaires, all of which were valid. The data of the current study were collected in English for five days. The collected data were entered into SPSS (Version 25) and AMOS (Version 24) for further analyses. The researchers used Structural Sequential Modeling (SEM) to answer the raised hypotheses. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a powerful analytical method chosen for its ability to investigate complex relationships among multiple variables, both observed and latent. The decision to use SEM is rooted in its capacity to go beyond traditional statistical approaches. SEM allows researchers to model intricate relationships within a comprehensive framework. It accommodates latent variables, offering a more nuanced understanding of phenomena that cannot be directly measured. It is well-suited for examining multiple variables simultaneously, offering a holistic perspective on the interplay between factors. This makes it particularly valuable

in educational research, where various factors may influence outcomes. In summary, it was chosen to provide a robust analytical framework that goes beyond traditional statistical methods, offering a comprehensive exploration of relationships in the research context.

5. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

To address the examination question, the researchers collected the filled questionnaires and entered the data into SPSS and AMOS. The consequences of these examinations are introduced in the accompanying tables and figures.

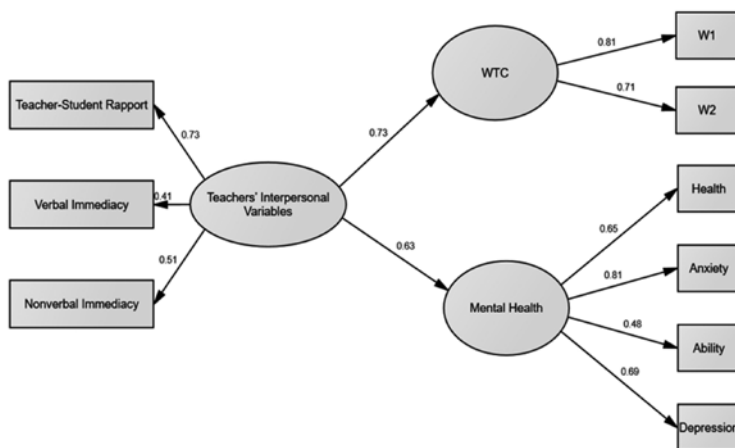


Figure 1. *The Research Models in the Standardized Estimation Mode*

The structural model result in Figure 1 shows the attained steady model fit estimation. The indicators of fit: CMIN/DF = 2.503 (CMIN = 2.503, df = 18); GFI = 0.941 (spec. > 0.9), NFI = 0.952 (spec. > 0.9), CFI = .942 (spec. > 0.9), and RMSEA = 0.055 (spec. < 0.080). In sum, Figure 1 analytically shows that teachers' interpersonal variables have an exceptionally critical effect ($\beta=0.73, P=.000$) on EFL students' willingness to communicate. This figure also shows that teachers' interpersonal variables have an exceptionally critical effect ($\beta=0.63, P=.000$) on EFL students' mental health. These lists recommended that the structural model gave a current good fit to the information and yielded a verifying incentive for the good model fit. Correspondingly, the significance of understanding educators' relational factors in EFL students' eagerness to impart and their emotional wellness.

Table 1. *Model Fit Result*

Model	CMIN/DF	DF	P	CMIN	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Default model	2.503	18	.000	112.143	.941	.952	.942	.0553
Saturated model		0		.000	.942	.936	1.000	
Independence model	11.197	32	.000	272.521	1.000	1.000	.000	.178

The findings from Table 1 highlight favorable model fit indices, all falling within pre-determined specifications. The specific fit indices and their respective values are as follows: CMIN/DF: The calculated value of 2.503, meeting the specified criterion (≤ 3.0), signifies a satisfactory fit. GFI: With a value of 0.941 surpassing the threshold (> 0.9), GFI indicates a strong fit between the model and observed data. NFI: A value of 0.952, exceeding the specified cutoff (> 0.9), indicates a robust fit, considering the model’s complexity. CFI: The computed CFI value of 0.942, surpassing the criterion (> 0.9), reflects a good fit, comparing the proposed model with a baseline model. RMSEA: With a value of 0.055, falling below the specified limit (< 0.080), RMSEA suggests a precise fit. These results collectively affirm the adequacy of the structural equation model. Furthermore, the outcomes of Table 1 highlight that teachers’ interpersonal variables significantly predict both the mental health and willingness to communicate of EFL students.

Table 2. *Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)*

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Teacher-Student Rapport	← Teachers’ Interpersonal Variables	.733	.046	11.718	***
Verbal immediacy	← Teachers’ Interpersonal Variables	.410	.046	18.345	***
Non-Verbal immediacy	← Teachers’ Interpersonal Variables	.515	.022	18.609	***
Teachers’ Interpersonal Variables	← WTC	.731	.036	35.730	***
Teachers’ Interpersonal Variables	← Mental health	.638	.046	24.735	***
Health	← Mental health	.654	.040	32.131	***
Anxiety	← Mental health	.812	.041	16.672	***
Ability	← Mental health	.484	.043	24.221	***
Depression	← Mental health	.692	.041	25.204	***

The aftereffects of Table 2 demonstrate that every one of the six null hypotheses is dismissed. The outcomes demonstrate that the primary null speculation is dismissed, and there is a massive contrast between EFL students’ eagerness to convey and teacher-student compatibility. The consequences of this table likewise show that the second null speculation is dismissed, and there is a massive contrast between EFL students’ readiness to convey and teachers’ verbal quickness. Teachers’ non-verbal promptness as another variable fundamentally affects EFL students’ ability to impart. This huge worth is likewise seen between teacher-student compatibility and EFL students’ psychological wellness. The outcomes uncover that the fifth speculation is dismissed, and there is a tremendous contrast between teachers’ verbal quickness and EFL students’ emotional wellness. At last, the consequences of Table 2 show that there is a tremendous distinction between teachers’ non-verbal promptness and EFL students’ emotional well-being.

Table 3. *Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)*

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Teacher-Student Rapport	73.001	.938	142.927	0.001
Verbal immediacy	41.442	.531	127.570	0.001
Non-Verbal immediacy	51.324	.155	116.387	0.001
Teachers’ Interpersonal Variables	73.642	.368	117.986	0.001

Health	65.014	.429	115.844	0.001
Anxiety	81.732	.437	96.091	0.001
Ability	48.554	.391	94.808	0.001
Depression	69.652	.377	114.156	0.001

The results of Table 3 demonstrate that 73 percent of changes in EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health can be predicted by their teacher-student rapport; 41 percent of changes in EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health can be predicted by their teachers' verbal immediacy; 51 percent of changes in EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health can be predicted by their teachers' non-verbal immediacy. In general, 73 percent of changes in EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health can be predicted by teachers' interpersonal variables. The results of Table 3 also indicate that among the subscales of mental health factors, anxiety plays the most significant role in determining EFL students' mental health status. The value indicates that 81 percent of changes in EFL students' mental health can be predicted by their anxiety level.

The initial findings of the research illuminate a compelling correlation between teachers' interpersonal variables and the mental health of EFL students. Specifically, the study indicates a substantial relationship, signifying that as teachers' communication skills advance, there is a concurrent improvement in the mental well-being of students. This underscores the pivotal role that effective teacher-student communication plays in fostering a positive mental health environment within the EFL educational setting. Moreover, the study brings to light another noteworthy observation — a positive and statistically significant relationship exists between the primary components of teachers' interpersonal variables and EFL students' willingness to communicate. This suggests that various aspects encompassing teachers' interpersonal skills, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, play a crucial role in shaping and encouraging students' readiness to engage in communication within the English as a Foreign Language context. These findings collectively emphasize the intricate interplay between teacher-student interpersonal dynamics, mental health outcomes, and the willingness of EFL students to actively participate in communication activities. To put it more clearly, the more the level of verbal, listening, and non-verbal skills and teachers' feedback increases, the more the EFL students' willingness to communicate increases. This research result is in line with the research results of Burke-Smalley (2018), under the title of investigating the effectiveness of teaching communication skills on EFL students' mental health. Correspondingly, the significance of this relationship is consistent with some of the findings and results of the study by Oubibi et al. (2023), Greenier et al. (2021), Derakhshan et al. (2021), and Corcoran and O'Flaherty (2022).

In addition, if we consider anxiety as one of the components of EFL students' mental health, the results of this research are consistent with the results of Dewaele and Pavelescu (2021) research that there is a significant relationship between teachers' behavior and EFL students' anxiety. It is also the same with the results of Henry and Thorsen (2018) research under the title of teacher-student relationships and L2 motivation. On the other hand, considering that mental health in students increases their academic adaptation, learning and success increases, it can be concluded that increasing teachers' communication skills will also increase EFL students' academic adaptation, learning and success, which is in line with

the results of Naal et al. (2022) and Lee (2020). Therefore, according to the results of the research, teachers' incorrect communication skills and inadequate relationships can make students suffer from stress and anxiety problems that overshadow their health. Another finding of this research has shown that there is a significant relationship between the interpersonal variables of teachers and EFL students' willingness to communicate, which is in line with the results of Oubibi et al. (2023) research, but it is not in line with the results of Liu et al. (2021) research. Of course, this difference could be due to the research community and the use of different tools in measuring teachers' communication skills.

EFL teachers can practically apply the research findings by incorporating strategies that enhance their interpersonal skills, fostering a positive impact on students' mental health and communication willingness. Implement immediate behaviors, such as maintaining eye contact, using positive gestures, and providing timely feedback, to create a supportive and engaging learning environment. Develop strong interpersonal communication abilities, including verbal and nonverbal skills, to positively influence students' perceptions and, consequently, their mental well-being and willingness to communicate. Focus on building meaningful relationships with students, emphasizing empathy, understanding, and creating a supportive learning atmosphere. In the evolving educational landscape, enhance online teaching competence, self-efficacy, and emotion regulation to address digital burnout and positively impact students' mental health and communication willingness. Recognize the influential role of teachers as agents of change for student mental health and actively contribute to creating a positive and supportive learning environment. By implementing these practical approaches, EFL teachers can contribute significantly to enhancing the mental health and communication willingness of their students.

In fact, the teacher is not only obliged to teach the contents of the books to the students but also plays a direct role in the formation of their character. Because students consider teachers as one of their important behavioral models, if teachers have good role models, they can leave a deep impact on the development of EFL students' personality and mental health (Aspfors & Bondas, 2013). Teachers who establish an interactive and balanced model between themselves and the students and in this connection pay enough attention to the personality and needs of the students and divide the work according to the talents and inclinations of the students will play a positive and influential role in the mental health of the students. Teachers should not spend their efforts on governing students but should try to direct EFL students' actions toward successful progress and adaptation as much as possible. The most important condition of good teachers in terms of mental health is that they love the students with complete sincerity and do not get offended by their behavior, but try to understand the depth of the EFL students' problems with patience and kindness and solve them as much as possible (Chaharbashloo et al., 2020).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the current study demonstrated that teachers' interpersonal variables play a key role in determining EFL students' willingness to communicate and mental health. Based on the results of this research, educational authorities should pay attention to the following points. The success of the educational system in the age of communication is possible only

on the basis of correct interaction between teachers and students and employing teachers with the necessary skills. And maybe the strengthening of this factor is the solution to many of the EFL students' problems. In this context, the relationship of each of the three main components of teachers' interpersonal variables with EFL students' mental health was measured. Based on the findings of the research, increasing the level of teachers' communication skills can increase EFL students' mental health status. Therefore, strengthening communication skills can be a way to solve EFL students' behavioral problems and their mental health. The view of teachers and educational planners regarding the importance of this has a significant role in improving teacher-students' interactions. Consequently, it is essential to acquaint teachers and key educational decision-makers with the primary components of communication skills, their impact on students' social and academic lives, and effective strategies for enhancing each element of teachers' communication skills.

In educational environments, the presence of efficient teachers is vital to establish better relationships with students. Because it is the teachers who make the educational environment an environment that can bring the hope horizon of friendship, balance, support, security, success, respect and happiness to the students. Therefore, teachers help students to develop socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Teachers have the most important position in this case. Teachers need proper communication skills to manage and deal with conflicts in the classroom. The usual answer to most teachers that want to know how to motivate students to learn is to instill in students a sense of confidence and trust so that they can tolerate failure (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021). Many researchers and teachers believe that the main obstacle to learning is fear; fear of failure, fear of reprimand and fear of being considered ignorant (Evans et al., 2019). But successful teachers make it possible for every student to be safe from punishment when he makes a mistake. Eliminating fear in students creates a basis for effort in him. Accepting students' mistakes with a cheerful face encourages them to learn.

Based on the research findings, education professionals, counseling centers, and parents are advised to place dual emphasis on studying factors influencing students' mental health. This includes delving into teachers' communication skills and identifying the key indicators that significantly impact these skills. Teachers should not spend all their efforts to get the best grades but should try to give responsibility to each person according to his ability and try as much as possible to develop the students intellectually, psychologically, and physically. Another important issue that teachers should pay attention to is the focus on evolution, which will have negative effects on students in terms of mental health. In the sense that teachers should not set the goal of studying for perfection and seeking superiority over others, but the goal should be only to acquire knowledge and ultimately be useful for ourselves and other members of society. Grades, especially numerical grades, stimulate children to compete fiercely and increase self-esteem, while it is not correct from the point of view of education and psychology that the main goal of education is only the desire to overcome others. Another factor of a student's mental health is his understanding by his teacher. Teachers have to accept that their responsibility is not limited to cultivating intellectual abilities and introducing students to cognitive, social, and moral values, but they are also responsible for changing and correcting incompatible behaviors and ensuring intellectual maturity and mental health of students. In addition, according to the findings of the research, which showed that the verbal skills of teachers have the greatest effect on the mental health of students, it is

suggested that stakeholders strengthen the verbal skills of teachers. Pay more attention to increase the mental health of students. It is also recommended to all teachers strengthen their knowledge in this field by reading books about communication skills, communication with students, and child psychology. Future studies can duplicate this study in other educational contexts or focus on other psychological factors that might play a role in affecting teachers' and EFL students' mental health.

6.1. Implications

The relationship between students' willingness to communicate and teachers' interpersonal variables has significant pedagogical implications in EFL settings. Educational institutions should incorporate training programs for EFL teachers, focusing on developing effective interpersonal communication skills, particularly immediacy behaviors. This can positively impact students' mental health and foster a willingness to communicate. Teachers play a crucial role in creating a supportive and positive classroom environment. Emphasizing interpersonal projection as a discourse strategy can enhance students' willingness to communicate, contributing to their mental well-being. Educational institutions and policy-makers should consider strategies to promote grit and autonomy among EFL learners. Grit, autonomy, and relatedness are linked to students' willingness to communicate, influencing their mental health. Recognizing the negative correlation between intrapersonal intelligence and willingness to communicate, educational institutions can develop interventions that enhance intrapersonal skills, contributing to improved mental health and communication readiness among EFL learners. Policy-makers should consider policies that support EFL teachers' well-being, acknowledging the role of teacher self-efficacy and emotional regulation in creating a positive learning atmosphere and subsequently influencing students' mental health.

6.2. Limitations

While investigating the relationship between EFL teachers' interpersonal variables and their students' mental health and willingness to communicate, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study design is correlational, making it challenging to establish causation. The identified associations do not imply a direct cause-and-effect relationship between EFL teachers' interpersonal variables and student outcomes. Second, the findings may have limited generalizability due to the study's specific focus on a particular EFL context. Cultural, institutional, or regional variations may affect the transferability of results to diverse educational settings. Next, reliance on self-report measures for assessing mental health and willingness to communicate introduces potential biases. Students may provide socially desirable responses, impacting the accuracy of the data. Next, the study may not account for external factors influencing mental health and willingness to communicate, such as socio-economic conditions, prior educational experiences, or other contextual elements. Next, the exploration of EFL teachers' interpersonal variables may not encompass all potentially influential factors. Other teacher-specific variables or external influences on students' well-being might be overlooked. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits insights into the temporal dynamics of the relationship. Longitudinal research could provide a

more nuanced understanding of how these variables evolve over time. Acknowledging these limitations enhances the transparency and interpretation of the study's findings, encouraging future researchers to address these aspects for a more comprehensive understanding.

6.3. Future Studies

Future research should employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs to establish causation between EFL teachers' interpersonal variables and student outcomes. Interventions manipulating teacher behaviors can help determine causal relationships. Conducting the study across diverse EFL contexts, considering cultural, institutional, and regional variations, will enhance the generalizability of findings. Comparative analyses can identify commonalities and differences in the impact of teacher variables on student outcomes. Incorporating objective measures, such as behavioral observations or physiological indicators, alongside self-reports, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of mental health and willingness to communicate. Triangulating data sources enhances the validity of findings. Future studies should systematically account for external factors by collecting detailed contextual information. Examining the influence of socio-economic conditions, prior educational experiences, and other relevant elements will contribute to a more nuanced analysis. Expanding the scope to include a broader range of teacher-specific variables, such as teaching styles, cultural competence, and emotional intelligence, will offer a more comprehensive understanding of their impact on student well-being. Conducting longitudinal research with multiple data points over time will capture the dynamic nature of the relationship. Examining how changes in teacher interpersonal variables correlate with shifts in student mental health and communication willingness can provide valuable insights.

7. REFERENCES

- Al-Murtadha, M. (2019). Enhancing EFL learners' willingness to communicate with visualization and goal-setting activities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 53(1), 133-157. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.474>
- Alavi, S. M., Dashtestani, R., & Mellati, M. (2022). Crisis and changes in learning behaviours: Technology-enhanced assessment in language learning contexts. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(4), 461-474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1985977>
- Alhadabi, A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2020). Grit, self-efficacy, achievement orientation goals, and academic performance in University students. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 519-535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1679202>
- Allen, M., Witt, P. L., & Wheelless, L. R. (2006). The role of teacher immediacy as a motivational factor in student learning: Using meta-analysis to test a causal model. *Communication Education*, 55(1), 21-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520500343368>
- Aspfors, J., & Bondas, T. (2013). Caring about caring: Newly qualified teachers' experiences of their relationships within the school community. *Teachers and Teaching*, 19(3), 243-259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.754158>
- Berg, D. A. G., Skaalvik, E. M., Asil, M., Hill, M. F., Uthus, M., Tangen, T. N., & Smith, J. K. (2023). Teacher self-efficacy and reasons for choosing initial teacher education programmes

- in Norway and New Zealand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 125, 104041. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104041>
- Bilican, F. I. (2013). Help-seeking attitudes and behaviors regarding mental health among Turkish college students. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 42(2-3), 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.2753/IMH0020-7411420203>
- Burke-Smalley, L. A. (2018). Practice to research: Rapport as key to creating an effective learning environment. *Management Teaching Review*, 3(4), 354-360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2379298118766489>
- Chaharbashloo, H., Gholami, K., Aliasgari, M., Talebzadeh, H., & Mousapour, N. (2020). Analytical reflection on teachers' practical knowledge: A case study of exemplary teachers in an educational reform context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 87, Article 102931. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102931>
- Chow, B. W.-Y., Chiu, H. T., & Wong, S. W. L. (2018). Anxiety in reading and listening English as a foreign language in Chinese undergraduate students. *Language Teaching Research*, 22(6), 719-738. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817702159>
- Collie, R. J., Granziera, H., & Martin, A. J. (2019). Teachers' motivational approach: Links with students' basic psychological need frustration, maladaptive engagement, and academic outcomes. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 86, 102872. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.07.002>
- Corcoran, R. P., & O'Flaherty, J. (2022). Social and emotional learning in teacher preparation: Pre-service teacher well-being. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 110, 103563. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103563>
- De Loof, H., Struyf, A., Boeve-de Pauw, J., & Van Petegem, P. (2021). Teachers' motivating style and students' motivation and engagement in stem: The relationship between three key educational concepts. *Research in Science Education*, 51(1), 109-127. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-019-9830-3>
- Denies, K., Yashima, T., & Janssen, R. (2015). Classroom versus societal willingness to communicate: Investigating French as a second language in Flanders. *The Modern Language Journal*, 99(4), 718-739. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12276>
- Derakhshan, A., Coombe, C., Arabmofrad, A., & Taghizadeh, M. (2020). Investigating the Effects of English Language Teachers' Professional Identity and Autonomy in Their Success. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 9(1), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.22054/ilt.2020.52263.496>
- Derakhshan, A., Kruk, M., Mehdizadeh, M., & Pawlak, M. (2021). Boredom in online classes in the Iranian EFL context: Sources and solutions. *System*, 101, 102556. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102556>
- Dewaele, J.-M., & Pavelescu, L. M. (2021). The relationship between incommensurable emotions and willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language: a multiple case study. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(1), 66-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1675667>
- Ebrahimi Ghassemi, A. (2018). Assessing college students' ego-identity status and their use of motivational regulation strategies. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 47(2), 137-157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2017.1367449>
- Evans, D., Butterworth, R., & Law, G. U. (2019). Understanding associations between perceptions of student behaviour, conflict representations in the teacher-student relationship and

- teachers' emotional experiences. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 82, 55-68. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.008>
- Finch, J. E., Akhavein, K., Patwardhan, I., & Clark, C. A. C. (2023). Teachers' self-efficacy and perceptions of school climate are uniquely associated with students' externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 85, 101512. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2023.101512>
- Frenzel, A. C., Daniels, L., & Burić, I. (2021). Teacher emotions in the classroom and their implications for students. *Educational Psychologist*, 56(4), 250-264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1985501>
- García-Rodríguez, L., Iriarte Redín, C., & Reparaz Abaitua, C. (2023). Teacher-student attachment relationship, variables associated, and measurement: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 38, 100488. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100488>
- Greenier, V., Derakhshan, A., & Fathi, J. (2021). Emotion regulation and psychological well-being in teacher work engagement: A case of British and Iranian English language teachers. *System*, 97, 102446. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102446>
- Gupta, M. D., Basu, A., & Thakurta, R. (2022). Re-examining the relationship between interpersonal reactivity index sub-scales and mental well-being: Implications of the pandemic. *Acta Psychologica*, 228, 103621. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103621>
- Hagenauer, G., & Volet, S. E. (2014). Teacher-student relationship at university: an important yet under-researched field. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(3), 370-388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.921613>
- Henry, A., & Thorsen, C. (2018). Teacher-student relationships and L2 motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 102(1), 218-241. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12446>
- Hiver, P., Al-Hoorie, A. H., Vitta, J. P., & Wu, J. (2017). Engagement in language learning: A systematic review of 20 years of research methods and definitions. *Language Teaching Research*, 0(0), 13621688211001289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211001289>
- Kim, H. C. (2021). Mediating effect of stigma on the relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking attitudes among university students in South Korea. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2021.1965397>
- Lazarides, R., Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2023). Does school context moderate longitudinal relations between teacher-reported self-efficacy and value for student engagement and teacher-student relationships from early until midcareer? *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 72, 102136. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2022.102136>
- Lee, J. H. (2020). Relationships among students' perceptions of native and non-native EFL teachers' immediacy behaviours and credibility and students' willingness to communicate in class. *Oxford Review of Education*, 46(2), 153-168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1642187>
- Liu, H., Zhou, Z., Fan, X., Luo, H., Wang, D., Wang, J., Shen, C., & Nawaz, R. (2021). A mixed method study to examine the mental health problems of college students who had left-behind experiences. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 292, 149-160. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.04.087>
- Maulana, R., & Opdenakker, M.-C. (2014). Teachers' interpersonal involvement as a predictor of students' academic motivation among Indonesian secondary school students: A multilevel growth curve analysis. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(3), 591-603. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-013-0132-7>

- Mellati, M., & Khademi, M. (2019). MOOC-based learning environments: A comparison of conventional, synchronous and flipped classrooms. In J.-B. Son (Ed.), *Context-Specific Computer-Assisted Language Learning* (pp. 50). APACALL.
- Michos, K., Cantieni, A., Schmid, R., Müller, L., & Petko, D. (2022). Examining the relationship between internship experiences, teaching enthusiasm, and teacher self-efficacy when using a mobile portfolio app. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 109*, 103570. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103570>
- Misbah, Z., Gulikers, J., Maulana, R., & Mulder, M. (2015). Teacher interpersonal behaviour and student motivation in competence-based vocational education: Evidence from Indonesia. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 50*, 79-89. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.04.007>
- Misbah, Z., Gulikers, J., Widhiarso, W., & Mulder, M. (2022). Exploring connections between teacher interpersonal behaviour, student motivation and competency level in competence-based learning environments. *Learning Environments Research, 25*(3), 641-661. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-021-09395-6>
- Naal, H., Tavitian-Elmadjian, L. R., & Yacoubian, H. A. (2022). Predictors of mental health literacy in a sample of university students in Lebanon. *International Journal of Mental Health, 51*(4), 381-403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2020.1838239>
- Oppermann, E., & Lazarides, R. (2021). Elementary school teachers' self-efficacy, student-perceived support and students' mathematics interest. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 103*, 103351. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103351>
- Oubibi, M., Chen, G., Fute, A., & Zhou, Y. (2023). The effect of overall parental satisfaction on Chinese students' learning engagement: Role of student anxiety and educational implications. *Heliyon, 9*(3), e12149. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12149>
- Pekrun, R. (2021). Teachers need more than knowledge: Why motivation, emotion, and self-regulation are indispensable. *Educational Psychologist, 56*(4), 312-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1991356>
- Peng, J.-E. (2020). Teacher interaction strategies and situated willingness to communicate. *ELT Journal, 74*(3), 307-317. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaa012>
- Pishghadam, R., Derakhshan, A., Jajarmi, H., Tabatabaee Farani, S., & Shayesteh, S. (2021). Examining the role of teachers' stroking behaviors in EFL learners' active/passive motivation and teacher success [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.707314>
- Pishghadam, R., Derakhshan, A., Zhaleh, K., & Al-Obaydi, L. H. (2023). Students' willingness to attend EFL classes with respect to teachers' credibility, stroke, and success: A cross-cultural study of Iranian and Iraqi students' perceptions. *Current Psychology, 42*(5), 4065-4079. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01738-z>
- Schwarzenthal, M., Daumiller, M., & Civitillo, S. (2023). Investigating the sources of teacher intercultural self-efficacy: A three-level study using TALIS 2018. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 126*, 104070. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104070>
- Wettstein, A., Ramseier, E., & Scherzinger, M. (2021). Class- and subject teachers' self-efficacy and emotional stability and students' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship, classroom management, and classroom disruptions. *BMC Psychology, 9*(1), 103. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-021-00606-6>

- Wondie, Y., & Abawa, M. (2019). Westernization versus indigenization in the context of global mental health: training and services in Ethiopia – University of Gondar in focus. *International Journal of Mental Health, 48*(4), 257-271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2019.1644139>
- Xie, F., & Derakhshan, A. (2021). A conceptual review of positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors in the instructional context [Conceptual Analysis]. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.708490>
- Yin, H., Tam, W. W. Y., & Lau, E. (2023). Happy teachers are efficacious and committed, but not vice versa: Unraveling the longitudinal relationships between Hong Kong kindergarten teachers' psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and commitment. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 123*, 103997. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103997>