Iranian EFL Students' L2 Engagement: The Effects of Teacher-student Rapport and Teacher Support

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Abstract

Given that L2 engagement serves a vital role in students' academic success, studying the predictors of this construct seems critical. Notwithstanding, factors influencing one's engagement in an L2 context have remained unclear. To respond to this gap, the current research aimed to unravel the effects of teacher-student rapport and teacher support on Iranian EFL students' L2 engagement. In doing so, 216 Iranian students majoring in Applied Linguistics, Linguistics, English Translation, or English Literature were invited to cooperate in this investigation. To obtain the required data, three pre-designed scales were virtually distributed among the respondents. Then, through correlation tests, the association between teacher support, teacher-student rapport, and student L2 engagement was measured. Following that, the effects of teacher-student rapport and teacher support on Iranian students' L2 engagement was assessed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The correlational analysis uncovered a strong, favorable association between constructs. The SEM analysis also indicated that teacher-student rapport and teacher support can strongly influence Iranian students' engagement in EFL classes. The implications of results are further discussed.

Keywords: L2 engagement, teacher support, teacher-student rapport, Iranian students, EFL classes

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1. Introduction

Second language engagement, which is called L2 engagement, is thought to be the precursor of students' L2 success as it helps them thrive in language classes (Baralt et al., 2016; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). To put it another way, learners with low levels of L2 engagement are unable to become successful in classroom contexts (Christenson et al., 2012). For this reason, students' L2 engagement has always been of considerable importance to principals, teachers, and instructors in any language learning environment, including English classes. L2 engagement generally pertains to the degree of attempt and attention students devote to second language learning (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). According to Fredericks et al. (2016), one's L2 engagement is an indication of the physical and psychological resources that s/he directs toward language learning activities. As Jarvela and Renninger (2014) noted, deliberate and ongoing engagement in classroom settings may culminate in greater language achievements for students. In this regard, Lambert, Philp, and Nakamura (2017) also maintained that students who report a high degree of engagement in their L2 learning will outperform in language classes.

Due to the vital role that L2 engagement may serve in raising students' learning outcomes (Jarvela & Renninger, 2014; Philp & Nakamura, 2017), identifying the antecedents of this variable sounds critical. To answer this necessity, educational scholars have conducted several investigations into the role of students' personal resources like emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, academic motivation, autonomy, academic buoyancy, and academic self-concept in their L2 engagement (e.g., Beri & Stanikzai, 2018; Ghelichli et al., 2020; Schnitzler et al., 2021; Thomas & Allen, 2021; Wang, 2022; Yuan & Kim, 2018, among others). Further, with the advent of "Positive Psychology (PP)", many research studies have considered the role of positive communication behaviors in students' L2 engagement (e.g., Amiryousefi et al., 2019; Derakhshan, 2021; Estepp & Roberts, 2015, among others). Nonetheless, the role of teacher-student rapport and teacher support as two positive communication behaviors has been narrowly recognized (Gregory & Korth, 2016; Martin & Collie, 2019; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021), which warrants further investigations in this regard.

Teacher-student rapport pertains to a harmonious relation between students and teachers founded on trust, respect, friendship, and mutual understanding (Frisby & Martin, 2010). For Verschueren and Koomen (2012), teacher-student rapport is a friendly, secure, and supportive relationship that teachers establish with their pupils

in classroom settings. To build such a relationship with students, teachers must value their viewpoints, realize their feelings, and satisfy their academic expectations (Wilson & Ryan, 2013). As Hughes and Cao (2018) mentioned, an intimate relationship between professors and students shapes students' academic engagement by making the learning process more enjoyable. Likewise, Roorda et al. (2019) noted that a mutual, trusting bond between teachers and students can cultivate a sense of belonging among students, which is beneficial for their behavioral and emotional engagement.

Another communication behavior that may affect L2 engagement is teacher support, which includes the ongoing assistance and guidance teachers provide to their students in classroom settings (Federici & Skaalvik, 2014). Supportive teachers, as Pitzer and Skinner (2017) noted, are those who attend to their students while teaching and assist them in solving their learning problems. According to Strati et al. (2017), supportive teachers are able to remarkably promote their students' classroom engagement. As they mentioned, students will passionately engage in classroom settings if their teachers think highly of them and support them in the learning process. Similarly, Jia et al. (2020) argued that the amount of support students receive from their instructors is extremely influential in their classroom participation. According to them, students who receive a great deal of support within educational environments are willing to invest more time and energy in doing classroom activities.

Notwithstanding the fact that student engagement is subject to teacher-student rapport and teacher support (Jia et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2019; Strati et al., 2017), the impact of these communication behaviors on students' L2 engagement has been neglected. To put it another way, a few educational researchers have looked at the role of teacher-student rapport and teacher support in students' engagement in language classes (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Kim & Aguskin, 2022; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021). Furthermore, as existing literature reveals, no research study has concurrently focused on the function of these behaviors. To narrow the gaps, the present research seeks to assess the effects of teacher-student rapport and teacher support on Iranian students' L2 engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher-student Rapport

Teacher-student rapport has been characterized as sensitive, amiable, and sincere relationships between teachers and students (Frisby & Martin, 2010). It deals with "the degree to which students feel supported, respected, and valued by their teachers" (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011, p. 85). Accordingly, to establish a strong rapport, teachers should constantly support their students, respect their ideas, and value their academic efforts (Wilson, Wilson, & Legg, 2012). In this respect, Thompson (2018) maintained that teachers can build a warm, mutual relationship with their pupils only if they care about their needs and interests.

Moreover, Thornberg et al. (2020) argued that teachers may create intimate relationships with their students through fulfilling their academic expectations. Showing compassion and kindness, according to Virat (2022), also helps teachers to build an emotional bond with their students. In classroom settings with strong teacher-student bonds, students tend to put more energy and effort into accomplishing their academic duties (Quin, 2017). As put forward by Roorda et al. (2017), an affective teacher-student relationship serves a vital role in students' academic success in that it directs students towards active participation in learning contexts.

Because of the significance of teacher-student rapport in classroom settings, it has always been appealing for academic researchers to study its educational consequences (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2022; Engels et al., 2021; Ibarra, 2014; Wanders et al., 2020, among others). Ibarra (2014), for instance, studied the function of teacher-student relationships in learners' classroom participation. To accomplish this, two pre-designed scales were handed out among 64 students. The analysis of students' answers illuminated that a reciprocal teacher-student relationship can increase learners' participation in classroom settings. By the same token, Wanders et al. (2020) scrutinized the impact of teacher-student rapport on learners' classroom engagement. For this aim, 4128 learners were asked to respond to two valid surveys. Data analysis indicated that teacher-student rapport can enormously affect students' involvement in classroom settings.

Furthermore, in a recent study, Engels et al. (2021) measured the effects of emotional teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement. In doing so, the questionnaires of teacher-student relationships and student school

engagement were given to a large sample of 5382 students. Relying on gathered responses, the researchers reported that emotional teacher-student relationships can considerably affect students' school engagement. Additionally, in their cross-cultural inquiry, Derakhshan et al. (2022) explored teacher-student rapport to find whether it predicts Polish and Iranian students' engagement in pursuing academic goals. To do so, two pre-developed surveys were administered to 431 Polish and Iranian university students. Running structural equation modelling (SEM), the researchers found that teacher-student rapport favorably predicted both Polish and Iranian students' engagement in pursuing learning objectives.

2.2. Teacher Support

The construct of teacher support is typically concerned with the amount of help, guidance, and feedback an individual teacher delivers to his or her pupils inside the classrooms (Filak & Sheldon, 2008). As Tennant et al., (2015) mentioned, there are four different ways through which teachers can support their pupils in classroom settings: "*Emotional support*", "*appraisal support*", "*instrumental support*", and "*informational support*". According to Tennant et al., (2015), emotional support pertains to the extent to which instructors care about their learners and their personalities. The second type of teacher support, appraisal support, relates to the amount of formal and informal feedback teachers offer to their pupils (Murray et al., 2016).

Instrumental support, as the third type of teacher support, includes physical and tangible assistance that teachers offer to their pupils in the face of learning barriers (Federici & Skaalvik, 2014). Finally, informational support alludes to the information and advice teachers offer to help their pupils overcome their problems (Guess & McCane-Bowling, 2016). Taken together, teachers' emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational support for their pupils may considerably contribute to higher levels of academic motivation (Anderman et al., 2011), belongingness (Osterman, 2010), and engagement (Conner et al., 2014). Put differently, supportive teachers can make a noticeable difference to the degree of motivation, belongingness, and engagement students demonstrate in learning environments (Kiefer et al., 2015).

Given the vital role of teacher support in educational circumstances (Anderman et al., 2011; Conner et al., 2014), multitudes of research have been performed to scrutinize its impact on students' classroom behaviors (e.g., Dietrich et al., 2015;

Feng et al., 2019; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021, among others). Dietrich et al. (2015) ran a study on teacher support to evaluate its effects on students' classroom efforts. To this aim, 1155 German students were given two valid questionnaires to submit their viewpoints regarding the impact of teacher support on students' classroom efforts. As data analysis revealed, teacher support was viewed to be highly influential in students' classroom efforts.

Furthermore, in a similar study, Feng et al. (2019) scrutinized the influence of teacher support on Chinese students' educational efforts. To do so, two reliable measures of teacher support and student academic effort were distributed among 666 Chinese students. The results of structural equation modeling indicated that teacher support can significantly affect students' academic efforts. By the same token, Sadoughi and Hejazi (2021) explored the power of teacher support in predicting Iranian students' academic engagement. To this end, using multi-stage cluster sampling, 435 EFL students were selected to respond to two reliable questionnaires. The data analysis demonstrated that teacher support can dramatically contribute to Iranian students' academic engagement in EFL classes.

2.3. Student L2 Engagement

Student engagement generally pertains to the quality and quantity of strides an individual student takes towards his or her academic goals (Eccles & Wang, 2012). Within language classes, student engagement refers to the degree to which students engage themselves in acquiring a new language (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). More specifically, student L2 engagement is concerned with the amount of energy and effort one invests in learning a second language (Zhou et al., 2021). Student L2 engagement is a multidimensional construct with three interrelated facets: "*Emotional engagement*", "*behavioral engagement*", and "*cognitive engagement*" (Sang & Hiver, 2021). As the first facet, emotional engagement denotes the interest, enthusiasm, passion, and enjoyment an L2 learner demonstrates while acquiring a second language (Phung et al., 2021).

Behavioral engagement as the second facet of L2 engagement relates to the quality and intensity of L2 learners' in-class participation, perseverance, and effort (Carver et al., 2021). The third facet of L2 engagement, cognitive engagement, pertains to "learners' mental processes such as the deliberate allocation and maintenance of attention and intellectual effort" (Zhou et al., 2021, p. 77). Engaged L2 learners, according to these facets, are alert, diligent, and passionate in second language classes (Mercer et al., 2021).

Students' L2 engagement, as self-determination theory (SDT) suggests, largely relies on the degree to which their basic needs are satisfied in learning environments (Reeve, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Put differently, how successfully teachers meet their students' basic needs can directly affect the quality and quantity of students' engagement in language classes. In light of SDT, Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that students' basic needs like *"need for autonomy"* and *"need for belongingness"* can be fully satisfied through positive relationships with teachers. They also asserted that supporting students in classroom settings enables teachers to fulfill students' fundamental needs. Accordingly, through supporting students and establishing intimate relationships with them, teachers may make a remarkable difference in students' L2 engagement. Notwithstanding this supposition, the impact of teacher support and teacher-student rapport on students' L2 engagement has been rarely explored (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Kim & Aguskin, 2022; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021). In response to this lacuna, the current inquiry sought to unravel the effects of teacher-student rapport and teacher support on students' L2 engagement in Iranian EFL classes. To accomplish this, the following research questions were raised:

▪ To what extent, if any, is there any significant association between teacher-student rapport, teacher support, and student L2 engagement?

▪ To what extent do teacher-student rapport and teacher support predict Iranian EFL students' L2 engagement?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A random sample of 216 EFL students was recruited from three different universities in Iran (i.e., Golestan University, Gonbad University, and Mazandaran University). The sample consisted of 155 females and 61 males, ranging in age from 18 to 30 ($SD = 2.17$, $Mean = 21.46$). The participants were BA (87%), MA (9%), or Ph.D. (4%) students majoring in English Translation, Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, or English Literature. The participants were all persuaded that their personal data would remain private.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. L2 Engagement Scale

This scale was developed and validated by Zhou et al. (2021) to measure students'

degree of engagement in an L2 context. The L2 engagement scale includes 24 items, assessing students' behavioral (items 1-8), emotional (items 9-16), and cognitive engagement (items 17-24). This is a 5-point Likert scale as responses to its items can vary from 1 "totally disagree" to 5 "totally agree". The phrase "In my language class this semester" is the stem that each item begins with. The following are some items on the L2 engagement scale: item (8) "*I paid attention and listened carefully*", item (11) "*I wanted to understand what I was learning*", and item (20) "*I tried to understand my mistakes when I got something wrong*". In the current research, a reliability index 0.87 of was reported for the L2 engagement scale.

3.2.2. Teacher Support Scale (TSS)

The "*Teacher Support Scale (TSS)*" was revised and validated by Metheny, McWhirter, and O'Neil (2008) to examine students' perceptions of the degree of support that teachers offer inside the language classes. As a five-point Likert scale, the answers to TSS's items can vary from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Sample items comprise "*My teacher is interested in my future*", "*My teacher is helpful when I have questions about school issues*", and "*My teacher cares about what happens to me*". In this investigation, a reliability value of 0.94 was attained for this scale.

3.2.3. Professor–Student Rapport Scale (P-SRS)

This questionnaire was developed by Wilson and Ryan (2013) to evaluate how students perceive their relationships with a particular professor. The P-SRS is consisted of 34 items. Among them, one can refer to item (10) "*My professor is a mentor to me*", item (16) "*I want to take other classes taught by my professor*", and item (29) "*My professor is a role model*". Respondents are required to score each item on a 5-point, Likert-type scale with answer options varying from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". In this research, a reliability index of 0.94 was obtained for this scale.

3.3. Procedure

First, an informed consent form was submitted by the respondents, demonstrating their inclination to cooperate in the present investigation. Second, through Google Forms, the online format of the above-mentioned questionnaires was prepared. Then, the questionnaire link was shared among the respondents using WhatsApp

messenger. It took the respondents about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Subsequently, through correlation tests, the obtained data was analyzed to measure the interrelationships of teacher support, teacher-student rapport, and student L2 engagement. Following that, the role of teacher-student rapport and teacher support in students' L2 engagement was tested using SEM analysis.

4. Results

Initially, with the aim of detecting and eliminating any problematic data, participants' responses to the close-ended questionnaires were evaluated. As a result, among 216 solid responses, eight cases (No., 5, 25, 33, 43, 49, 108, 139, and 158) with a persistent/raising/falling pattern were discovered and removed. Following that, the Standard Deviation (SD) of participants' answers was measured to detect the answers with values below 0.5. Consequently, five more cases (No., 24, 109, 122, 151, and 196) were excluded. Finally, 203 responses were retained for the main analysis.

Before the main analysis, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out to ensure the construct validity. The initial model comprised all three constructs with items in second order. Then, for each construct, non-significant loadings and/or low estimates were calculated. As Table 1 demonstrates, no non-significant unstandardized estimate was discovered. However, one item from teacher-student rapport (R17), one item from teacher support (S01), and seven items from L2 engagement (E05, E09, E11, E21, E22, E23, and E24) had standardized estimates below 0.5, which were all excluded.
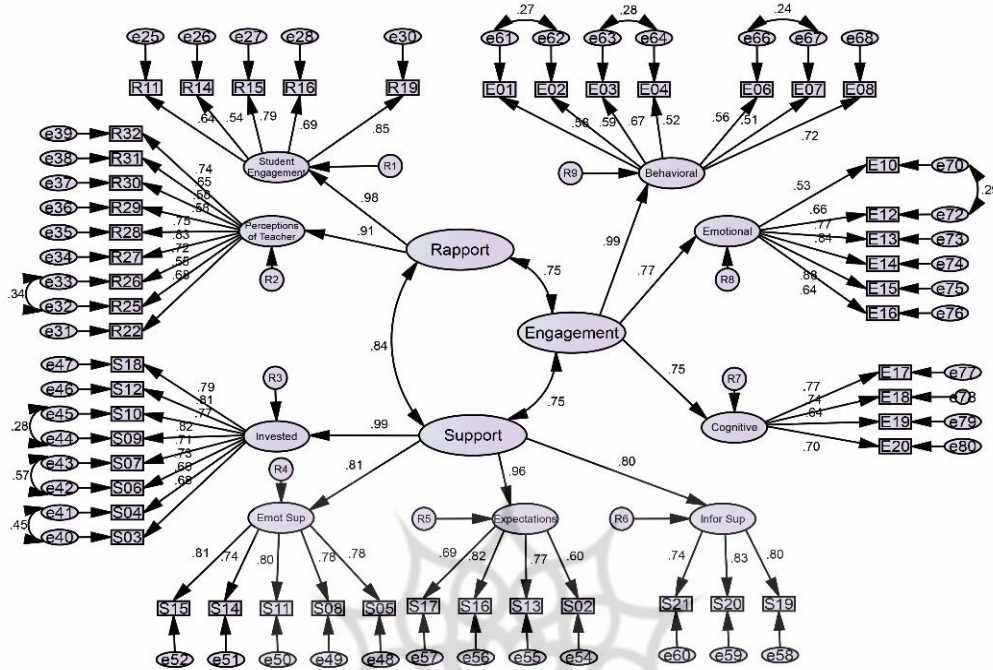
Table 1

Unstandardized and Standardized Estimates of the Initial Model

			Unstandardized				Standardized
			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Estimate
Behavioral	<---	Engagement	1.000				.943
Emotional	<---	Engagement	.576	.122	4.727	.000	.855
Cognitive	<---	Engagement	.827	.120	6.911	.000	.773
Invested	<---	Support	1.000				.985
Info.Support	<---	Support	.864	.098	8.851	.000	.805
Expectations	<---	Support	.556	.095	5.870	.000	.950
Em.support	<---	Support	.897	.101	8.864	.000	.801
Perception	<---	Rapport	1.000				.907
S.Engagement	<---	Rapport	1.126	.144	7.831	.000	.989
R11	<---	S.Engagement	1.000				.647
R14	<---	S.Engagement	.964	.139	6.935	.000	.541
R15	<---	S.Engagement	1.436	.150	9.560	.000	.793
R16	<---	S.Engagement	1.309	.153	8.564	.000	.691
R17	<---	S.Engagement	.297	.121	2.460	.014	.182
R19	<---	S.Engagement	1.554	.155	10.057	.000	.848
R22	<---	Perception	1.000				.681
R25	<---	Perception	.844	.110	7.698	.000	.582
R26	<---	Perception	1.162	.121	9.607	.000	.740
R27	<---	Perception	1.306	.124	10.557	.000	.823
R28	<---	Perception	1.193	.122	9.757	.000	.752
R29	<---	Perception	.993	.129	7.679	.000	.580
R30	<---	Perception	.935	.123	7.613	.000	.575
R31	<---	Perception	.982	.115	8.514	.000	.648
R32	<---	Perception	1.157	.120	9.641	.000	.743
S03	<---	Invested	1.000				.700
S04	<---	Invested	1.033	.109	9.450	.000	.693
S06	<---	Invested	1.025	.100	10.289	.000	.756
S07	<---	Invested	.973	.097	10.067	.000	.739
S09	<---	Invested	1.115	.099	11.272	.000	.831
S10	<---	Invested	1.111	.105	10.626	.000	.782
S12	<---	Invested	1.115	.102	10.930	.000	.805
S18	<---	Invested	1.069	.101	10.579	.000	.778
S05	<---	Em.support	1.000				.786
S08	<---	Em.support	.948	.081	11.698	.000	.778
S11	<---	Em.support	.988	.082	12.023	.000	.795
S14	<---	Em.support	.849	.077	10.958	.000	.737
S15	<---	Em.support	1.043	.085	12.245	.000	.808
S01	<---	Expectations	1.000				.442
S02	<---	Expectations	1.225	.216	5.669	.000	.621
S13	<---	Expectations	1.718	.277	6.194	.000	.777
S16	<---	Expectations	1.901	.301	6.307	.000	.821

S17	<---	Expectations	1.631	.275	5.923	.000	.688
S19	<---	Info.Support	1.000				.800
S20	<---	Info.Support	1.030	.085	12.068	.000	.829
S21	<---	Info.Support	.981	.091	10.730	.000	.740
E01	<---	Behavioral	1.000				.607
E02	<---	Behavioral	1.027	.145	7.087	.000	.606
E03	<---	Behavioral	.911	.118	7.692	.000	.676
E04	<---	Behavioral	.737	.111	6.633	.000	.557
E05	<---	Behavioral	.505	.121	4.171	.000	.326
E06	<---	Behavioral	1.012	.147	6.870	.000	.582
E07	<---	Behavioral	.906	.141	6.445	.000	.537
E08	<---	Behavioral	.952	.119	8.015	.000	.716
E09	<---	Emotional	1.000				.391
E10	<---	Emotional	1.231	.247	4.994	.000	.601
E11	<---	Emotional	.672	.166	4.041	.000	.388
E12	<---	Emotional	1.720	.325	5.284	.000	.711
E13	<---	Emotional	1.968	.367	5.357	.000	.746
E14	<---	Emotional	2.247	.411	5.461	.000	.803
E15	<---	Emotional	2.317	.419	5.534	.000	.850
E16	<---	Emotional	1.520	.300	5.066	.000	.626
E17	<---	Cognitive	1.000				.763
E18	<---	Cognitive	.801	.083	9.620	.000	.723
E19	<---	Cognitive	.770	.092	8.364	.000	.628
E20	<---	Cognitive	.774	.086	8.993	.000	.675
E21	<---	Cognitive	.259	.117	2.209	.027	.169
E22	<---	Cognitive	.414	.114	3.619	.000	.276
E23	<---	Cognitive	.603	.109	5.553	.000	.421
E24	<---	Cognitive	.452	.118	3.812	.000	.290

Subsequently, modification values with a threshold of 10 were assessed, and recommendations that were not contradictory to the existing literature were implemented. The modified CFA model is portrayed in the following figure (Figure 1).

Figure 1
The Modified CFA Model with Standardized Estimates

The descriptive statistics of the components after regression imputation are displayed in Table 2. In regression imputation, each item is weighted depending on its contribution to explaining the average variance of its component.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Scores after Regression Imputation

		N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Teacher-Student	S.Engagement	203	1.01	3.97	2.9525	.53962	-.701	.973
Rapport	Perception	203	.90	4.14	3.1103	.52366	-.726	1.594
Teacher Support	Invested	203	1.03	4.85	3.5269	.65688	-.662	1.531
	Em.support	203	1.01	4.96	3.4421	.70818	-.439	1.010
	Expectations	203	.72	3.38	2.4995	.44560	-.690	1.668
	Info.Support	203	.97	4.71	3.3854	.66610	-.879	1.733
L2 Engagement	Behavioral	203	1.84	5.08	3.7844	.61946	-.355	.286
	Emotional	203	.84	2.84	2.0437	.45312	-.382	-.292
	Cognitive	203	1.27	5.18	4.0385	.61082	-.795	2.066

With respect to skewness and kurtosis values than were less than 2, all score distributions were totally normal. Next, the discriminant validity and composite reliability (CR) for each variable were examined (Table 3).
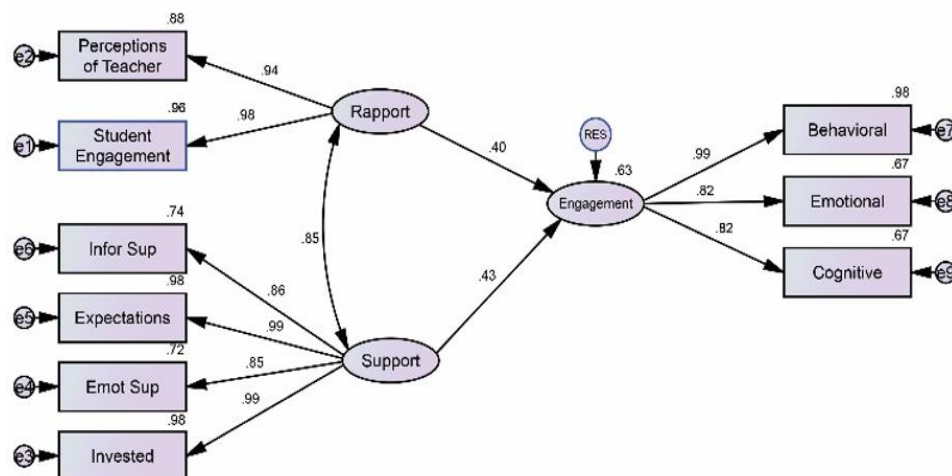
Table 3
Discriminant Validity and Composite Reliability of the Variables

	CR	AVE	MSV	Fornell-Larcker Criterion		
				Teacher-student Rapport	Teacher Support	L2 Engagement
Teacher-student Rapport	0.946	0.897	0.696	**0.947**		
Teacher Support	0.940	0.797	0.696	0.834**	**0.893**	
L2 Engagement	0.873	0.698	0.571	0.755**	0.756**	**0.835**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01

The correlation analysis uncovered positive, significant associations between all pairs of variables. A remarkable, desirable association was discovered between teacher-student rapport and teacher support (r = .834, p. < 01). Likewise, a strong, positive correlation was found between teacher support and L2 engagement (r = .756, p < .01). Furthermore, a direct and desirable connection was found between teacher-student rapport and L2 engagement (r = .755, p < .01). In addition, for all three variables, the "Average Variances Extracted (AVE)" were above 0.5 and the "Maximum Shared Variance (MSV)" were below AVE, which confirms the convergent validity of the model. Besides, the square root of AVE for each variable (the bold indices in the table) was greater than the associations among the variables. This demonstrates the model's discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Finally, to unravel the function of teacher-student rapport and teacher support in predicting students' L2 engagement, a prediction model was created through SEM. The prediction model is represented in the figure below.

Figure 2
The Prediction Model

Table 4
Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis with SEM

			Weight	S.E.	C.R.	P	β	R^2	Multiple correlation R^2
Engagement	<---	Support	.408	.077	5.284	.000	.654	.428	.628
Engagement	<---	Rapport	.452	.092	4.903	.000	.628	.395	
Support	<-->	Rapport	.302	.033	9.249	.000	.851		

As shown in Table 4, the constructs of teacher support (β = .654, p = .000 < .01) and teacher-student rapport (β = .628, p = .000 < .01) were both strong predictors of students' L2 engagement, jointly explaining 62.8% of the variance in students' L2 engagement. However, teacher support was a better predictor, accounting for 42.8% of the variance in students' L2 engagement.

5. Discussion

The initial objective of this inquiry was to scrutinize the interrelationships between teacher support, teacher-student rapport, and students' L2 engagement. The outcomes of composite reliability indicated that both teacher-student rapport and teacher support were strongly associated with students' engagement in L2 classes. The composite reliability results also demonstrated that teacher support was closely linked with teacher-student rapport. The finding of this study concerning the positive association between teacher-student rapport and students' L2 engagement

is in agreement with Ibarra's (2014) results, which uncovered that teacher-student rapport is closely correlated with students' classroom engagement. This finding also accords with Wanders et al.'s (2020) observations, which demonstrated a direct, positive connection between teacher-student rapport and learners' classroom involvement. Besides, the result of this inquiry regarding the interrelationships between teacher support and students' L2 engagement is consistent with those of Dietrich et al. (2015) who reported a desirable link between teacher support and students' educational endeavors. This outcome further verifies the outcomes of Feng et al.'s (2019) study, which disclosed a close link between teacher support and students' efforts in language classes. Finally, the present study's outcome on the direct association between teacher-student rapport and teacher support lends support to the idea of Wilson et al. (2012), who asserted that teacher support is of great help for building intimate relationships with students. A probable reason for this outcome may be that supporting pupils inside the classrooms empowers teachers to establish cordial relationships with them (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011).

Along with its initial purpose, this research also tried to unravel the role of teacher-student rapport and teacher support in predicting students' L2 engagement. The results attained from the inspection of the structural model indicated that both teacher-student rapport and teacher support could favorably predict students' L2 engagement. It implies that having cordial relationships with teachers and receiving adequate support throughout the L2 acquisition process urges students to emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively engage in classrooms. This finding corroborates Sadoughi and Hejazi's (2021) results, which elucidated that teacher support can favorably influence students' learning engagement. This outcome is also in congruent with those of Derakhshan et al. (2022) who reported that an intimate teacher-student relationship can dramatically predict language learners' academic engagement.

The power of teacher-student rapport and teacher support in predicting students' L2 engagement may be reasonably justified through self-determination theory. Referring to this theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) argued that learners' engagement in classroom contexts is subject to the degree to which their fundamental needs are appeased by their instructors. To them, how effectively instructors meet their learners' fundamental needs has a noticeable impact on the quantity and quality of their classroom engagement. They further asserted that building strong rapport with learners enables instructors to satisfy their learners' fundamental needs. In their

recent inquiry, Ryan and Deci (2017) also posited that offering emotional, instrumental, and appraisal support also helps instructors fulfill their learners' core requirements, which, in turn, promotes learners' classroom participation.

6. Conclusion

The present study was performed to assess the correlations between teacher support, teacher-student rapport, and students' L2 engagement, as well as the role of teacher-student rapport and teacher support in Iranian students' L2 engagement. The correlational tests elucidated that teacher-student rapport and teacher support are strongly associated with students' L2 engagement. In line with our expectations, the prediction model also revealed that students' L2 engagement can be favorably predicted by teacher-student rapport and teacher support. A significant implication that emerges from these results is that language teachers who suffer from their learners' academic disengagement are required to build strong rapport with pupils in order to enhance their classroom engagement. For the same reason, they are also recommended to constantly support their learners during the L2 acquisition process. Another notable implication that may arise from these findings is that teacher trainers who are in charge of educating novice and inexperienced teachers should teach them how to establish close, mutual relations with students. This, in turn, helps teachers improve their students' engagement in learning environments. Given the value of teacher support in improving students' engagement, they are also expected to make adequate attempts to raise teachers' awareness of emotional, appraisal, and instrumental support.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the results of our investigation are subject to three major limitations. First, the probable effects of situational variables like age, gender, language proficiency, and academic major were not addressed in this inquiry. Future investigations are thus required to examine the influences of these variables on the interrelationships of the constructs. Second, following the method of the study, some pre-designed questionnaires were employed to inspect participants' viewpoints. Future researchers can attain more comprehensive findings by employing other data-gathering instruments (e.g., interviews, observations, journal writing, among others). Third, the results obtained from this research might not be transferable to language learners in "English as a Second Language (ESL)" contexts in that the current inquiry was exclusively carried out in an EFL setting. Hence, future L2 scholars are recommended to study the associations between teacher support, teacher-student rapport, and student L2 engagement in an ESL context.

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