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Emotional Intelligence and Engagement in Language Learning: A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Their Impact on English Language Proficiency

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***Abstract*—This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and engagement in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning among 362 Saudi adult learners. Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence in Language Learning Questionnaire (EILLQ) and the Language Learning Engagement Questionnaire (LLEQ), which were specifically developed for this study, along with semi-structured interviews and learners' reflective journals. The findings revealed that the learners exhibited moderate to high levels of EI across all its five components, with motivation receiving the highest mean score, followed by self-awareness and social skills. Self-regulation and empathy also showed moderate levels, suggesting a well-rounded emotional foundation among the learners. Similarly, the participants displayed moderate to high levels of engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, with mean scores that reflected a balanced engagement profile. Additionally, the study found a strong positive correlation between EI and engagement in EFL learning. Both EI and engagement significantly impacted English language proficiency, with engagement showing a slightly stronger influence. These findings highlight the critical role of EI in enhancing learner engagement and language proficiency, which suggests that educational strategies focused on developing EI could significantly improve EFL learning experiences and outcomes.**

***Index Terms*—emotional intelligence, language learning engagement, EFL learning, English language proficiency**

I. Introduction

The role of emotional intelligence (EI) in education has been receiving increased attention in recent years (Barchard et al., 2016; Halimi et al., 2021; MacCann et al., 2020; Wood, 2020). EI, as conceptualized by Goleman (1995), involves the capacity to identify, comprehend, and regulate both one's own emotions and those of others. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, EI plays a crucial role because it can impact learners' self-confidence, motivation, and interpersonal relationships, all of which are key components for successful language learning (Mercer & Gkonou, 2017; Oxford, 2016; Sucaromana, 2012). Moreover, given the inherent challenges of language learning, the ability to manage emotions and sustain motivation is particularly important for EFL learners (Shao et al., 2013). Previous research on EI (e.g., Ebrahimi et al., 2018a, 2018b; Farooq, 2014; Genç et al., 2016; Pishghadam, 2009; Saud, 2019; Taheri et al., 2019) demonstrated its positive impact on language skill development. Numerous studies have also explored the interplay between EI and various learner factors, such as cognitive intelligence, language learning strategies, learning styles, foreign language enjoyment (FLE), and learner autonomy (e.g., Li, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Resnik & Dewaele, 2020, 2023; Shen, 2021; Taheri et al., 2019). Furthermore, EI helps learners manage the stress and anxiety often associated with language learning, which allows them to focus on learning activities and build resilience in the face of challenges, thereby leading to greater proficiency (Li et al., 2021; Resnik & Dewaele, 2020; Shao et al., 2013). This suggests that learners with higher EI are more likely to exhibit behaviors indicative of strong engagement, such as active participation in class and persistence through difficulties. Conversely, low EI may lead to disengagement and other unfavorable outcomes, such as academic stress and burnout (McEown et al., 2024).

Engagement in language learning refers to the degree of attention, interest, investment, and effort that learners exhibit during language learning activities (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). It encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions that reflect how learners interact with learning materials, peers, and teachers (Fredricks et al., 2004). The importance of engagement in EFL learning cannot be overstated. High engagement is typically associated with increased effort, perseverance, and a positive attitude toward learning. Engaged learners are more likely to practice language skills regularly, participate in class activities, and seek out additional learning opportunities outside the classroom. This sustained effort and positive attitude toward learning can significantly enhance language development and proficiency (see e.g., Aubrey et al., 2022; Taboada Barber et al., 2020; Zhang, 2022). As such, learner engagement has become a focal point for researchers and educators who are aiming to address challenges related to motivation, attendance, and academic performance (see Fredricks et al., 2004). Previous studies on

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learner engagement in EFL classrooms (e.g., Dao, 2020, 2021; Dao et al., 2021; Lambert & Zhang, 2019; Lambert et al., 2017; Philp & Duchesne, 2016) primarily focused on task-based interactions. These studies suggested that engagement is influenced by factors such as the creation of learner-generated content, task-oriented goal setting, and the implementation of interaction strategies.

A thorough review of previous studies on the roles of EI and engagement in EFL learning revealed a dynamic interplay: EI enhances engagement, and engaged learners further develop their emotional skills, which creates a richer language-learning experience. Although the significance of EI and engagement in educational settings is well recognized, there is a notable lack of research that explored their interaction within EFL contexts, with the exception of a recent study conducted by McEown et al. (2024) among Japanese learners of English. Addressing this gap is crucial because understanding how these factors interact can provide deeper insights into the processes that drive successful language learning. Moreover, understanding the role of EI and engagement in language learning can help tackle broader educational challenges. For example, fostering an emotionally intelligent and supportive learning environment can reduce attrition rates and enhance overall learner well-being. As educators become more attuned to the emotional and engagement-related needs of their students, they can adopt more inclusive instructional strategies that cater to diverse learner profiles.

This study aimed to investigate the intricate relationship between EI and engagement among EFL learners in Saudi Arabia and to explore the possible influences of these factors on English proficiency. It employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena. Four research questions guided this research:

1. How do the different components of EI manifest among Saudi EFL learners?
2. What are the levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement among the learners?
3. How does EI relate to engagement in EFL learning?
4. How do EI and engagement influence English language proficiency?

II. Literature Review

A. Emotional Intelligence

EI has received significant attention over the past few decades due to its profound impact on various aspects of life, including personal, academic, and professional domains. The term "emotional intelligence" was introduced in 1990 by John Mayer, Maria DiPaolo, and Peter Salovey. They defined it as "the accurate appraisal and expression of emotions in oneself and others and the regulation of emotion in a way that enhances living" (Mayer et al., 1990, p. 772). This foundational work established the importance of EI in understanding human behavior and interpersonal relationships and laid the groundwork for further exploration and expansion of the concept. In 1995, Daniel Goleman, a prominent psychologist, popularized the concept of EI and outlined a model that consisted of five main components:

1. Self-Awareness: The capacity to identify and comprehend one's own emotions. In EFL learning, self-awareness helps learners identify their emotional responses to different learning activities and environments, thereby enabling them to address any negative feelings that might hinder their progress.
2. Self-Regulation: The ability to control and direct one's emotions in a constructive way. For EFL learners, self-regulation aids in maintaining motivation and dealing with frustration or anxiety related to language challenges, thus fostering a more resilient learning approach.
3. Motivation: The drive to achieve objectives with enthusiasm and persistence. Motivation is crucial for EFL learners as it affects their willingness to practice, participate, and persevere in learning.
4. Empathy: The ability to perceive and relate to the emotions of others. Empathy enhances communication skills and helps EFL learners understand cultural nuances and perspectives, which is essential for effective language use and building meaningful connections with others.
5. Social Skills: Competence in managing relationships and building networks. Social skills are vital for EFL learners to engage in meaningful interactions and practice communication in real-life contexts that enhance language development.

Goleman's model has been widely employed in educational and organizational settings to improve interpersonal communication, leadership skills, and emotional well-being (see e.g., Aamir, 2023; Greenockle, 2010; Hess & Bacigalupo, 2011; Mayer et al., 2000; Palmer at al., 2008; Safarlı, 2021). This research adopted Goleman's model to examine how EI was demonstrated among the participants and contributed to their learning engagement and overall English proficiency. It is important, however, to note that the literature sometimes distinguishes between two types of EI. Petrides and Furnham (2000) introduced the concept of "trait emotional intelligence" (TEI), which contrasts with "ability emotional intelligence" in terms of measurement methods. Ability EI is assessed through performance-based evaluations, while TEI is measured using self-report questionnaires. In this paper, the term EI refers specifically to TEI, which was the focus of the assessment in this research.

Research across various foreign language (FL) contexts has underscored the pivotal role of EI in shaping the emotional experiences of the learners. Higher EI was associated with reduced foreign language anxiety (FLA) and improved FLE (see Li, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Resnik & Dewaele, 2020; Shao et al., 2013). Empirical studies have also highlighted the significant impact of EI on overall language proficiency. For example, Pishghadam (2009) investigated

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EI among Iranian university students and discovered that various EI dimensions were closely linked to academic success across the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Building on these insights, Taheri et al. (2019) explored the interplay between EFL learners' EI, cognitive intelligence, language learning strategies, and language achievement. The researchers found that certain EI subdomains, such as interpersonal relationships, optimism, and problem-solving, were significantly associated with higher language achievement. The study also revealed that higher EI correlated strongly with the use of effective language learning strategies and learning styles.

Focusing on Saudi EFL learners, Farooq (2014) observed a positive correlation between EI and English proficiency among Saudi university students. Higher EI levels positively influenced proficiency in the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Complementing these findings, Saud (2019) demonstrated that higher EI among Saudi undergraduates, especially in terms of "utilization of emotion" and "management of others' emotions," was associated with better English achievement. These studies collectively demonstrated the pivotal role of EI in enhancing various aspects of language learning and academic performance among EFL learners. By fostering positive emotional environments, reducing FLA, and improving language skills, EI proves to be an essential factor for achieving successful outcomes in FL education across diverse learner populations.

B. Engagement in Language Learning

Learner engagement, despite its relatively recent recognition, has become a fundamental factor in creating meaningful task experiences in the FL classroom (Dörnyei, 2019; Ellis, 2018). It plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of language instruction, and it influences both motivation and learning outcomes (Afzali & Izadpanah, 2021; Aubrey et al., 2022; Raman at al., 2023; Taboada Barber et al., 2020; Zhang, 2022). Bygate and Samuda (2009) defined learner engagement as the combination of resources and efforts that learners utilize to achieve their language learning objectives. Understanding how engagement impacts the learning process can, therefore, aid educators in designing more interactive and effective language tasks.

The multidimensional model of engagement, developed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris in 2004, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding learner engagement. This model identified three primary dimensions of engagement, each of which addresses a different aspect of how learners interact with their learning environment.

1. Behavioral engagement focuses on participation and encompasses involvement in academic, social, and extracurricular activities. It includes behaviors such as regular attendance, active engagement in learning tasks, participation in discussions, adherence to rules and norms, and perseverance when facing challenges. In the context of EFL learning, this translates to regularly attending English classes, actively contributing to classroom discussions, completing homework assignments, and following classroom rules.
2. Emotional engagement involves expressing feelings toward teachers, peers, and the school environment and fostering a sense of belonging within the school community. It encompasses both positive emotions, such as satisfaction, enjoyment, and excitement, and negative emotions, such as boredom, stress, and resentment. In the EFL context, this includes positive feelings toward learning English, enthusiasm for participating in language activities, satisfaction upon achievement of learning goals, and anxiety or boredom during English lessons.
3. Cognitive engagement entails a commitment to learning and a willingness to invest the effort required to understand complex concepts and develop challenging skills. It has been linked to learners' alertness and attention during the learning process (Svalberg, 2009). This dimension encompasses the use of learning strategies, self-regulation, and persistence in challenging tasks. In the context of EFL learning, this includes employing effective language learning strategies, seeking additional resources to understand difficult grammar rules, applying critical thinking in language use, and setting personal language learning goals.

These dimensions are interrelated and collectively contribute to a holistic understanding of learner engagement. High levels of engagement across all three dimensions are fundamental for academic success as well as the overall learning experience (Fredricks et al., 2004). This model has been widely employed in educational research to analyze and enhance learner engagement in various language learning contexts (see e.g., Bitrián et al., 2021; Gunness et al., 2023; Hanaysha et al., 2023; Heilporn et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2023). In this research, it was also adopted to explore the levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement among the study participants.

While numerous studies have explored EFL learning engagement within online environments, this review focused exclusively on research conducted in traditional, in-person classrooms to provide a specific understanding of engagement dynamics in face-to-face learning settings, which was the focus of this study. For example, the research conducted by Lambert at al. (2017) focused on the benefits of using learner-generated content (LGC) versus teacher-generated content (TGC) in FL learning tasks and revealed that LGC tasks significantly improved all aspects of learner engagement as the participants were more invested in tasks related to their own experiences. Lambert and Zhang (2019) also found that LGC tasks led to higher social and emotional engagement, which was linked to increased fluency and accuracy, although the learners' emotional responses varied based on their previous FL learning experiences. Dao (2021) explored the impact of task goal orientation on learner engagement and discovered that while cognitive and social engagement were higher during convergent tasks, emotional engagement did not significantly differ between task types, which highlighted the complex interplay between task structure and emotional involvement. In a longitudinal study on learner engagement during EFL speaking tasks, Aubrey et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of task characteristics, such as familiarity and repetition, in enhancing engagement in learning tasks.

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Previous research on engagement among Saudi EFL learners revealed various influences of engagement on language learning. Alswuail (2015) observed that positive attitudes toward English, driven by practical and religious reasons, significantly enhanced student engagement, particularly when using technology and interactive activities. Similarly, Mohammed (2023) identified instructional practices, student expectations, motivation, and the curriculum as key factors influencing engagement. The study also highlighted several challenges to engagement, such as low English proficiency and a lack of supportive resources. Albahouth (2024) investigated the impact of flipped and interactive pedagogical approaches on learner engagement in grammar classes. The results indicated that the intervention group showed significant improvement in behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, although posttest scores did not differ significantly from the control group. The study also found that factors, such as motivation, learning styles, and teacher's level of experience influenced engagement, thus suggesting the need for tailored pedagogical strategies to enhance overall learner engagement.

III. Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative data to leverage the strengths of both broad statistical insights and in-depth personal experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie; 2004; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2015). This approach ensured that the findings would be both generalizable and richly detailed to capture the complexity of how EI and engagement interact to influence language proficiency.

A. Participants

The participants were recruited through an online call for participation targeting Saudi adults aged 21 to 35 who were enrolled in English-learning institutions around Saudi Arabia. The call detailed the study's purpose and provided contact information for inquiries, thus enabling a broad reach and facilitating recruitment across diverse regions of the country. Eligible participants were contacted to confirm their participation and schedule data collection sessions. A total of 362 individuals enrolled in the study. They were all native Arabic speakers and had taken the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) within the past year or during their current English course. Their IELTS scores were used to assess their English proficiency. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants

Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age group	21-25	192	53.04
	26-30	107	29.56
	31-35	63	17.40
Gender	Male	156	43.09
	Female	206	56.91
Region	Central	124	34.25
	Eastern	92	25.41
	Western	109	30.11
	Northern	21	5.80
	Southern	16	4.42
Educational attainment	High school	128	35.36
	Bachelor's degree	171	47.24
	Master's degree	63	17.40
Level of English proficiency (IELTS band score)	4 (Skill level: Limited)	96	26.52
	5 (Skill level: Modest)	141	38.95
	6 (Skill level: Competent)	125	34.53
Years of studying English	1-2 years	195	53.87
	3-4 years	124	34.25
	5+ years	43	11.88
Main reason for learning English	Personal interest	94	25.97
	Academic requirement	155	42.82
	Professional advancement	113	31.22

B. Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect the data needed for this research.

1. The Demographic Information Questionnaire

This was developed to collect the information presented in the "Participants" section. This data provided a comprehensive background of the participants, which aided in the contextualization of the study's findings.

2. The Emotional Intelligence in Language Learning Questionnaire (EILLQ)

This ten-item questionnaire was developed by the researcher to evaluate the EI of the EFL learners. Each pair of items assessed one of the five components of Goleman's EI model. The respondents rated each statement on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was originally developed in English and translated into Arabic to facilitate understanding. A back-translation process was

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conducted to ensure equivalence, with three experts verifying the accuracy and appropriateness of the translation. Table 2 presents the EILLQ statements categorized by the EI components.

TABLE 2
EILLQ STATEMENTS

EI component	Assessment statement
Self-awareness	1. I can recognize my emotions as I experience them while learning English. 2. I am aware of how my emotions affect my performance during English learning tasks.
Self-regulation	3. I can manage my emotions effectively when faced with challenges in learning English. 4. I am able to stay calm and focused under pressure while practicing English.
Motivation	5. I actively seek out opportunities to practice and improve my English skills. 6. I stay motivated to improve my English skills even when I encounter setbacks.
Empathy	7. I can understand the emotions of my classmates in English learning settings. 8. I am sensitive to cultural differences that affect how my peers learn English.
Social skills	9. I find it easy to collaborate with my classmates during English learning activities. 10. I am able to build positive relationships with my peers and teachers in the English classroom.

3. The Language Learning Engagement Questionnaire (LLEQ)

This questionnaire was designed specifically to provide a comprehensive assessment of the learners' engagement by evaluating their behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in the English classroom. It employed a 5-point Likert scale and consisted of nine items, with three sets of three items each assessing one of the three dimensions of Fredricks et al.'s (2004) model. Similar to the EILLQ, The LLEQ was translated from English to Arabic, back-translated for accuracy, and verified by three experts to ensure equivalence and appropriateness. Table 3 presents the LLEQ statements categorized by the engagement dimensions.

TABLE 3
LLEQ STATEMENTS

Engagement dimension	Assessment statement
Behavioral engagement	1. I regularly attend my English language classes. 2. I actively participate in class activities and discussions. 3. I complete my English homework and assignments on time.
Emotional engagement	4. I enjoy learning English and find it interesting. 5. I enjoy participating in English class activities. 6. I feel happy when I successfully understand or use English.
Cognitive engagement	7. I try to understand complex English concepts. 8. I use various strategies to improve my English skills (e.g., note-taking, using flashcards). 9. I stay focused and pay attention during English classes, even when the material is difficult.

4. Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted with 30 participants (17 females and 13 males) to gather in-depth qualitative data. The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed responses about their personal experiences with EI and engagement in English language classes. It included questions related to how their emotions affected their learning and their perceived importance of the five EI components. Additionally, the questions explored the participants' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in English learning, including attendance, participation, interaction with peers and teachers, handling of homework and assignments, and involvement in extracurricular activities.

5. Learners' Reflective Journals

The learners' journals provided qualitative data on their ongoing experiences and engagement in language learning. The participants were asked to write weekly journal entries that detailed their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to English learning. Prompts such as "Describe a significant learning moment this week" and "How did you feel about your progress in class?" were provided as needed to guide their reflections.

C. Data Collection Procedures

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaires used in this research, a thorough pilot study was conducted. Initially, three experts with PhDs in applied linguistics and more than 15 years of experience in EFL teaching reviewed the EILLQ and LLEQ for content validity. They examined whether the questionnaires adequately covered the constructs they were designed to measure and provided feedback for a few revisions. Following this approval process, the two questionnaires were administered to 50 participants similar to those in the main study, who were then asked to report any issues they encountered. Two weeks later, the same questionnaires were re-administered to the same participants. Cronbach's alpha values were computed to assess internal consistency; they yielded coefficients of 0.886 for the EILLQ and 0.881 for the LLEQ, which indicated high reliability for both questionnaires (as noted by Harrison et al., 2020 and Pallant, 2020). Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between the items from both administrations. All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level, and their values ranged from 0.672 to 0.854 for the EILLQ items and from 0.645 to 0.918 for the LLEQ items, which demonstrated strong test-retest reliability (as per Cohen's 2013 guidelines).

Data collection for the main study occurred in the spring term of 2023 and commenced with obtaining informed consent from all participants to ensure they were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures. The participants

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were informed of the voluntary nature of the study, their right to withdraw at any time without consequences, and the measures taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Following consent, the participants completed the three questionnaires, which were administered in an online format. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 30 volunteers to gather detailed qualitative data. The interviews were conducted in Arabic to ensure comfort and clarity for the participants and were recorded with their consent. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. Additionally, the same 30 participants maintained journals over the three-month duration of the study to document their language learning reflections. They were allowed to write in either Arabic or English to provide them with the freedom to express themselves more authentically and comfortably. A total of 281 journal entries were collected, which varied in length from 52 to 146 words, with approximately 17% of the entries written in English.

D. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the demographic information questionnaire, EILLQ, and LLEQ were analyzed statistically as detailed in the "Results and Discussion" section. The qualitative data from the interviews and learners' journals underwent thematic analysis, including transcription, coding, and theme development. This involved identifying significant patterns and themes through both inductive and deductive coding. The themes were then validated through data triangulation, with illustrative quotes used to enrich the quantitative findings and offer deeper insights into the participants' perceptions and personal experiences.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Research Question 1

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine how different EI components manifested among the Saudi EFL learners. The results revealed that the participants exhibited moderate to high levels of EI across all five components, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for the EI Scores

Component	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Self-awareness	3.59	1.12	1.00	5.00
Self-regulation	3.52	1.17	1.00	5.00
Motivation	3.61	1.14	1.00	5.00
Empathy	3.44	1.18	1.00	5.00
Social skills	3.56	1.17	1.00	5.00
Average total score	35.44	10.09	10.00	50.00

Motivation received the highest mean score (3.61), thereby indicating that the participants were driven and persistent in their efforts to learn English. This was followed by self-awareness at 3.59 and social skills at 3.56, which reflected the participants' ability to recognize their emotions and manage relationships effectively. Self-regulation had a mean score of 3.52, which suggested that the learners were able to manage their emotions well—a crucial element for sustaining focus and coping with the challenges of language learning. Empathy had the lowest mean score (3.44), although it still indicated a moderate level of understanding and sharing the feelings of others, which was essential for effective communication and collaboration. The standard deviation values for the EI components, ranging from 1.12 to 1.18, indicated a moderate level of variability in the participants' EI scores, which suggested that while most participants had similar levels of EI, there were some differences in how they perceived and managed their emotions. The range of scores for each component spanned from 1.00 to 5.00, and from 10.00 to 50.00 for the total EI scores, thereby demonstrating a diverse range of EI levels among the learners. The bar chart in Figure 1 displays the mean scores for the five components of EI.

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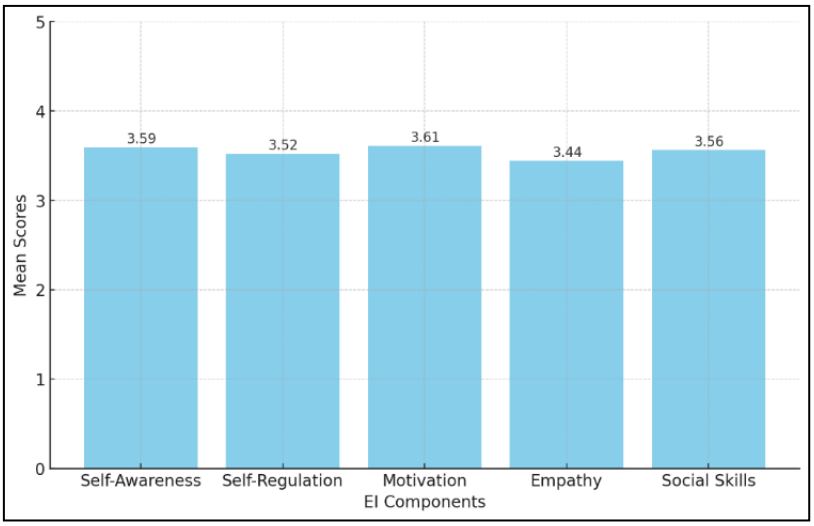

Figure 1. Mean Scores for the EI Components

These results were consistent with Shao et al. (2013) and Li (2020), who reported moderate to high levels of EI among the EFL learners in their studies. Overall, the balanced EI profile among the participants in this study suggested a supportive emotional foundation that could enhance their emotional well-being and success in learning English. This was further illustrated by the participants' own experiences shared through the interviews and reflective journals. For example, an interviewee noted, "Being aware of my emotions helps me manage stress better, especially during challenging assignments. It allows me to stay calm and focus on the tasks at hand without getting overwhelmed." Another participant reflected, "I find that staying motivated is crucial for my English learning journey. Whenever I face difficulties, I remind myself of my goals and the progress I've made, which keeps me going".

B. Research Question 2

To investigate the levels of language learning engagement among the participants, descriptive statistics were calculated for each dimension of engagement as well as the total engagement score. The results are summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE LEARNING ENGAGEMENT SCORES

Dimension	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Behavioral engagement	3.51	1.08	1.00	5.00
Emotional engagement	3.56	1.07	1.00	5.00
Cognitive engagement	3.50	1.11	1.00	5.00
Total engagement	31.72	9.11	9.00	45.00

The analysis revealed that the mean scores for behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement were fairly consistent, and they indicated that, on average, the learners exhibited moderate to high levels of engagement across all three dimensions. The total engagement score had a mean of 31.72, which reflected a balanced and overall high level of engagement among the participants. The standard deviations for the engagement dimensions ranged from 1.07 to 1.11, indicating moderate variability. This suggested that while many learners were highly engaged, there was a notable portion of them who exhibited lower levels of engagement. The range of scores for each dimension spanned from 1.00 to 5.00, and from 9.00 to 45.00 for the total engagement score, thereby demonstrating the diverse levels of engagement among the learners. The bar chart in Figure 2 illustrates the mean scores for the three dimensions of language learning engagement.

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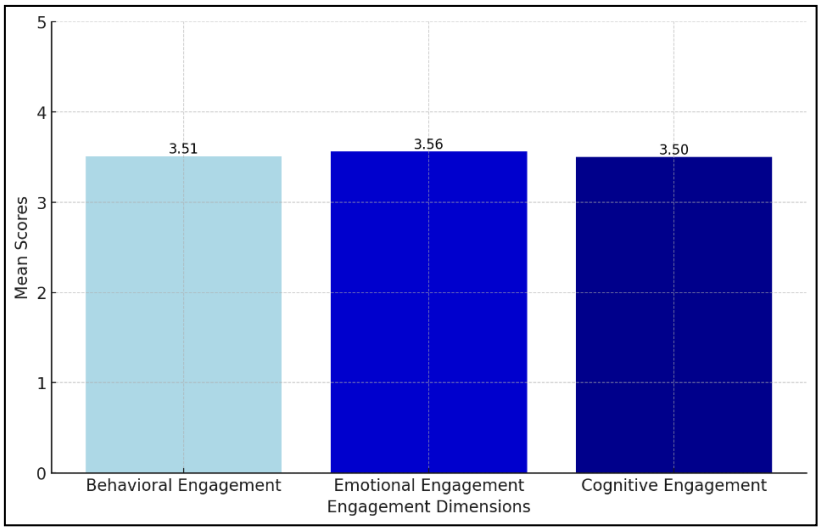

Figure 2. Mean Scores for the Learning Engagement Dimensions

These findings were consistent with Guo et al. (2023), who observed moderate overall engagement among the EFL learners in their research. The qualitative findings obtained in the current study provided support and clarification for these results. For example, one interviewee explained, "I really try to participate in all class activities because it helps me understand better and stay focused." Another interviewee shared, "I feel more connected to the class when the teacher encourages us to share our thoughts and feelings." Similarly, a learner reflected, "I like it when we have to solve problems or think about how to use what we learn in real life—it keeps me interested and involved." This highlights the critical need to foster an engaging learning environment that promotes active involvement across behavioral participation, emotional connection, and cognitive effort.

C. Research Question 3

To investigate the relationship between EI and engagement in EFL learning, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The analysis used the total EI score as the predictor variable and the overall engagement score as the dependent variable. The results are summarized in Tables 6 and 7.

TABLE 6
REGRESSION MODEL OVERALL STATISTICS

Statistic	Value
R^2	0.802
Adjusted R^2	0.801
F-statistic	1,458
Prob (F-statistic)	< 0.001

TABLE 7
REGRESSION MODEL COEFFICIENTS

Coefficient	Estimate	Standard error	t-value	*p*-value	95% Confidence interval
Intercept	3.08	0.78	3.95	< 0.001	[1.546, 4.613]
Total EI	0.81	0.02	38.19	< 0.001	[0.767, 0.850]

The analysis showed a strong positive relationship between overall EI and engagement in language learning, with an R^2 value of 0.802. This indicated that 80.2% of the variance in engagement could be explained by the total EI score. The high F-statistic value (1,458) and the extremely low *p*-value (less than 0.001) suggested that the model was highly significant. The coefficient for total EI (0.81) indicated that for every one-unit increase in EI, there was an associated increase of 0.81 unit in overall engagement. This relationship was statistically significant, with a *p*-value less than 0.001. The intercept of 3.08, also significant, suggested a baseline level of engagement when EI was zero. The bar chart in Figure 3 represents the regression coefficients along with their 95% confidence intervals.

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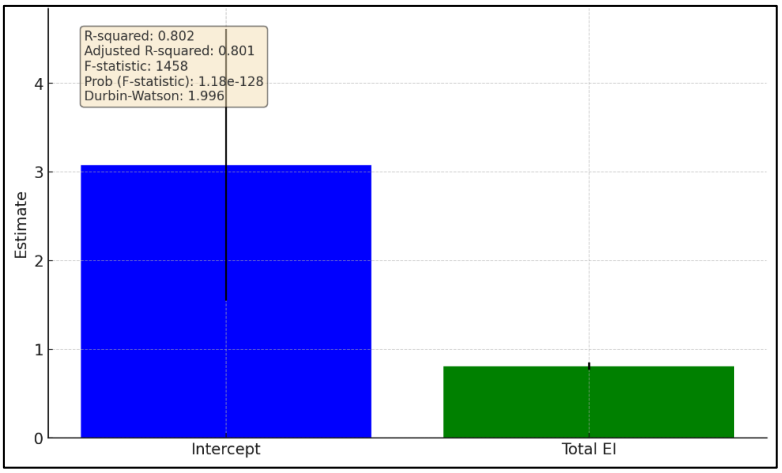

Figure 3. Regression Analysis of the Impact of EI on Language Learning Engagement

The thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed that self-awareness helped the learners identify their emotional responses to different learning tasks and situations and to focus their efforts effectively. For example, an interviewee explained, "By reflecting on my reactions to challenging assignments, I realized I was often anxious about making mistakes. Recognizing this helped me manage my stress better and allowed me to concentrate on improving my skills rather than worrying about failure." Self-regulation aided in managing such emotions and maintaining focus, thus preventing disruptions and enhancing behavioral and emotional engagement. Similarly, motivation drove the learners to pursue their learning objectives with energy and persistence, which was crucial for deep engagement across the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. As one participant reflected, "When I learned to control my frustration and stay focused during difficult tasks, I noticed I could study longer and stay more engaged. My motivation to reach my language goals kept me pushing through challenges." Furthermore, empathy improved peer interaction and collaboration, which fostered an engaging and supportive learning environment where the learners were able to understand and respond to affective cues. Social skills also enhanced communication and relationships and promoted all dimensions of engagement through effective navigation of group activities and discussions. For instance, a participant recounted, "Understanding my classmates' feelings and working together with empathy made our group discussions more productive and enjoyable. It felt easier to participate and invest myself in the activities when everyone was supportive and communicative." A thorough review of the literature identified only one study, McEown et al. (2024), which examined the link between these two factors. The study demonstrated that the TEI elements predicted engagement among Japanese learners of English, which aligned with the current study and underscored the critical role of EI in enhancing language learning engagement and outcomes.

D. Research Question 4

To investigate the influence of EI and engagement on English language proficiency, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The model included overall EI and overall engagement as predictor variables, with English language proficiency scores as the dependent variable. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 8 and 9.

TABLE 8
REGRESSION MODEL OVERALL STATISTICS

Statistic	Value
R^2	0.640
Adjusted R^2	0.638
F-statistic	319.1
Prob (F-statistic)	< 0.001

TABLE 9
REGRESSION MODEL COEFFICIENTS

Coefficient	Estimate	Standard error	t-value	*p*-value	95% Confidence interval
Intercept	2.8695	0.092	31.231	< 0.001	[2.689, 3.050]
Overall EI	0.1328	0.055	2.420	< 0.05	[0.025, 0.241]
Overall engagement	0.4937	0.055	9.022	< 0.001	[0.386, 0.601]

The analysis showed that both overall EI and overall engagement significantly influenced English language proficiency, although engagement appeared to have had a stronger impact compared to EI. The R^2 value of 0.640 indicated that 64.0% of the variance in proficiency scores could be explained by the model, which suggested a strong fit. The F-statistic of 319.1, with a *p*-value less than 0.001, confirmed that the model was statistically significant. The coefficient for overall EI was 0.1328, which meant that for every one-unit increase in overall EI, the proficiency score increased by approximately 0.133 units. This relationship was statistically significant, with a *p*-value less than 0.05. The

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coefficient for overall engagement was 0.4937, which indicated that for every one-unit increase in overall engagement, the proficiency score increased by approximately 0.494 units. This relationship was highly significant, with a *p*-value less than 0.001. The bar chart in Figure 4 represents the regression coefficients for the intercept, overall EI, and overall engagement and highlights their impact on English language proficiency.

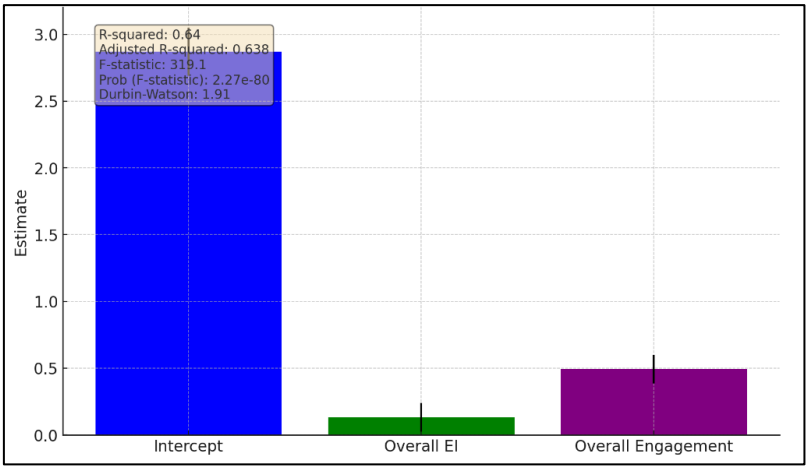

Figure 4. Regression Analysis of the Impact of EI and Engagement on English Proficiency

The qualitative findings corroborated and explained the statistical findings by highlighting the critical role of these two factors in English learning. First, the participants reported that self-awareness helped them identify their emotional needs and responses, which allowed them to address any negative feelings that might hinder their progress. For example, an interviewee noted, "By being self-aware, I could tell when I was feeling anxious about a particular assignment, and I took breaks or changed my learning approach to manage that anxiety better." Self-regulation also enabled the learners to manage their emotions and maintain focus, which enhanced both their persistence and overall performance in language tasks. Additionally, motivation drove the learners to pursue their language learning goals with energy and persistence and contributed to greater learning success. As one interviewee shared, "Learning to control my frustration and stay focused helped me not give up when the lessons got tough, and my motivation kept me pushing forward to achieve my English learning goals." Furthermore, empathy enabled the learners to understand and respond to each other's emotional needs. This empathetic atmosphere enhanced mutual support and facilitated effective communication, which ultimately led to better learning outcomes. Similarly, social skills enhanced language learning by improving interactions, fostering collaboration, and creating a more supportive learning environment. As one participant reflected, "Understanding my classmates' struggles and working together with them not only made the learning process more enjoyable but also helped me improve my language skills through better communication and cooperation".

In terms of language learning engagement, behavioral engagement provided more practice and exposure, which led to better language skills. For instance, an interviewee explained, "Being actively involved in class discussions and language exercises gave me more opportunities to practice and improve my English, making me feel more confident in my abilities." Additionally, emotional engagement enhanced the learning process by increasing the learners' interest and enthusiasm about the material. This positive emotional connection helped sustain motivation and focus and led to better performance. As one participant reflected, "When I enjoyed the activities and felt excited about what I was learning, I found myself more engaged and willing to put in extra effort, which really boosted my progress." Finally, learners who invested effort in understanding and applying language concepts, which exemplified cognitive engagement, reported achieving better learning outcomes. As one participant recounted, "Taking the time to deeply understand the grammar rules and apply them in different contexts helped me grasp the English language more thoroughly, resulting in significant improvement in my language skills." These findings, which demonstrated a positive impact on language learning and proficiency, were consistent with previous research on EI (e.g., Ebrahimi et al., 2018a, 2018b; Farooq, 2014; Genç et al., 2016; Goleman, 1995; Pishghadam, 2009; Saud, 2019; Taheri et al., 2019) and language learning engagement (e.g., Aubrey et al., 2022; Fredricks et al., 2004; Taboada Barber et al., 2020; Zhang, 2022). These results further validated the importance of integrating EI strategies to foster better engagement and language learning outcomes.

V. Conclusion

This study explored the intricate relationship between EI and engagement among Saudi EFL learners by addressing four key research questions. The findings provided significant insights into how these constructs interacted and influenced English proficiency. First, the study revealed that the learners exhibited moderate to high levels of EI, with particular strengths in motivation, self-awareness, and social skills. The above-average scores in motivation highlighted the learners' consistent drive to achieve their language learning objectives, while their self-awareness and social skills indicated a solid competence in terms of recognizing their emotions and effectively managing interpersonal

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relationships. These findings aligned with previous research that suggested that EI significantly contributes to learning outcomes by enhancing learners' ability to navigate emotional challenges and build supportive networks. Pedagogically, these results underscore the importance of creating a learning environment that supports emotional development. For instance, educators could integrate reflective practices and discussions that encourage students to explore their emotions and understand their impact on learning. Additionally, workshops focusing on emotional regulation and social skills could be incorporated to further enhance EI in language learning.

Second, the learners demonstrated moderate to high levels of engagement across the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement, evidenced by consistent attendance and active participation, reflected a steady commitment to the learning process. Emotional engagement, characterized by enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning activities, revealed a positive connection to the learning environment. Cognitive engagement, which involved effortful investment in understanding complex concepts, underscored a solid commitment to mastering the language. These findings suggested that a multifaceted approach to engagement is essential for effective language learning. For example, educators could incorporate project-based learning, which stimulates behavioral and cognitive engagement by requiring active participation and analytical thinking. Simultaneously, fostering a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere can enhance emotional engagement, thereby encouraging learners to become more invested in their language learning.

Third, the study found a strong positive correlation between EI and engagement in EFL learning, with higher EI associated with greater engagement across all dimensions. This relationship suggested that emotionally intelligent learners were better equipped to handle the emotional demands of language learning, which led to increased participation, enjoyment, and cognitive effort. For instance, self-regulation helped the learners manage anxiety and stay focused, while empathy and social skills enhanced collaborative learning. These insights emphasized the importance of integrating EI development into EFL instruction. Educators could leverage social-emotional learning frameworks to teach students how to understand and control their emotions, pursue and accomplish objectives, and build and sustain positive relationships.

Finally, both EI and engagement were found to significantly impact English language proficiency, with engagement showing a slightly stronger influence. The learners with higher EI were more likely to be engaged in their learning, and this engagement translated into better language proficiency. For example, the motivated learners (a component of EI) were more likely to engage in practice and to seek out additional learning opportunities, thereby improving their proficiency. Similarly, the learners who could manage their emotions effectively (self-regulation) were better able to persist through challenges, which led to better learning outcomes. These results suggested that fostering both EI and engagement should be a priority in EFL instruction.

The present study, while providing valuable insights into the relationship between EI and engagement in EFL learning, has a few limitations that warrant consideration. First, the use of self-reported measures may have introduced response bias, as the participants might have overestimated their EI and engagement levels. Additionally, although the sample exhibited demographic diversity, it was culturally specific, comprising solely Saudi EFL learners, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. The cross-sectional design of the study also restricts the ability to infer causality between EI, engagement, and language proficiency, as it captured data at a single point in time.

In order to mitigate these limitations, it is recommended that future research incorporate more objective measures of EI and engagement to reduce the likelihood of response bias. Additionally, expanding the sample to include learners from diverse cultural backgrounds would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the long-term impact of EI and engagement on English language proficiency, thereby providing deeper insights into how these constructs evolve and influence learning outcomes over time.

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