

# Investigating the Impact of Teacher Enthusiasm on Engagement Among Saudi First-Year EFL Students

Maram Saeed Alghamdi (Corresponding author)

English Language Institution (ELI), King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Dr. Hanadi Abdulrahman Khadawardi

English Language Institution (ELI), King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of teacher enthusiasm (TE) on student engagement in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, it explores the relationships between students' perceptions of TE and their levels of engagement, as well as the teaching methods that lead students to perceive their teachers as enthusiastic and the challenges teachers face in maintaining enthusiasm from the student perspectives. A mixed method approach was employed, involving questionnaires distributed to 202 primary year students and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 2 students. The quantitative findings revealed a significant positive correlation between TE and SE. The findings revealed that students perceived certain teaching methods as contributing to teacher enthusiasm, such as varying vocal tones, positive reinforcement, active movement in the classroom, incorporating interactive activities and discussions, and relating content to personal interests. When teachers lacked these enthusiastic methods, students reported a less engaging classroom experience characterized by monotony. Moreover, students reveal key challenges impeding TE which included workload, emotional distress, class timing, and lack of interest from some students. Based on these findings, the study offers practical recommendations for promoting student-centered pedagogy to enhance enthusiasm among EFL teachers and engagement among learners.

**Keywords:** EFL teaching, student engagement, teacher enthusiasm, students' perceptions

## 1. Introduction

The profound role of emotions in language learning and teaching has remained unexplored and largely overlooked (Dewaele et al., 2019). However, researchers now acknowledge that language learners experience a wide range of feelings that can impact their learning journey (Dewaele & Li, 2020). The rise of positive psychology (PP), a field dedicated to understanding and promoting factors that contribute to human well-being and optimal functioning (Peterson, 2006, p. 4), has redirected focus away from the "darker side of human nature" (Buck et al., 2008), which includes emotions like anger, shame, depression, and anxiety, to the more positive aspects of human experience. This shift highlights the importance of motivation, grit, and well-being, particularly in the language learning process (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019)

Positive psychology includes a range of positive emotions like pride, happiness, well-being, empathy, determination and engagement (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Engagement in particular has gained particular attention in recent years due to its importance for both learners' psychological well-being as well as successful language learning outcomes (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Among the different factors influencing student engagement (SE) teacher's enthusiasm and personality are particularly important (Peng, 2021; Maini et al., 2021). This is also in line with Dewaele & Li (2021) who state that students' perception of their teachers' enthusiasm plays a significant role in determining their engagement levels. Alharbi and Saaty (2022) posited that a deficiency in enthusiasm among English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers can adversely affect students' perceptions of language learning.

### *1.1 Statement of the Research Problem*

While research on teacher enthusiasm and its effects on student engagement is growing, there remains a significant gap in the literature (Peng, 2021), particularly in the context of Saudi EFL classrooms, where this topic has not yet been studied. Existing research, such as that by Frommelt et al. (2021), has shown TE's positive impact on SE in mathematics but calls for exploration across various subjects. Additionally, Dewaele and Li (2021) emphasize the unique role of TE in foreign language education and the need for more focused research. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating how teacher enthusiasm influences student engagement specifically in Saudi EFL classrooms.

### *1.2 Research Aims and Questions*

The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of TE on students' engagement in Saudi EFL classrooms. Specifically, this study explores the relationship between students' perceptions of TE and their level of engagement in EFL classes. Additionally, it seeks to identify the teaching methods that lead students to perceive their teachers as enthusiastic, as well as the challenges teachers face in maintaining enthusiasm in the EFL classroom from the students' perspectives. Specifically, it aims to address the following questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between PYP students' perceptions of TE and their engagement in the EFL classroom?

RQ2: Which teaching methods lead students to perceive their teachers as enthusiastic?

RQ3: What challenges do teachers face in maintaining their enthusiasm in the EFL classroom from the students' perspectives?

### *1.3 Significance of the Study*

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of TE and its impact on student engagement, particularly within the Saudi EFL context. Furthermore, the findings of this study are significant as they could offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of teacher enthusiasm. These insights are valuable for educators, administrators, and policymakers at King Abdulaziz University's (KAU) English Language Institute (ELI), informing efforts to enhance teaching practices and improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

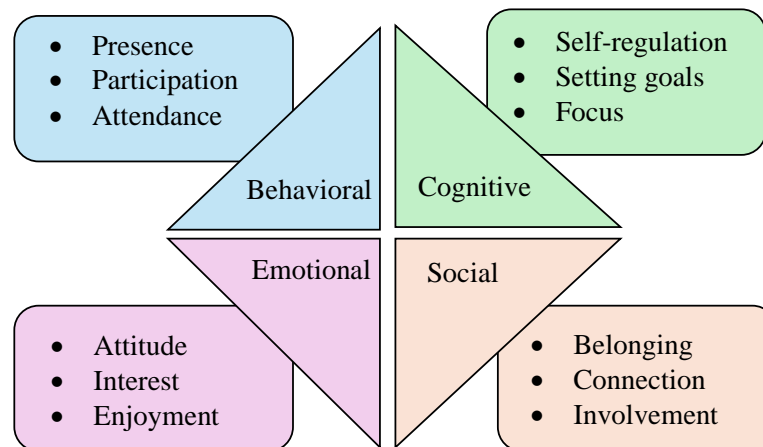
## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Student Engagement (SE)*

The foundational conceptual framework defines SE as students' active participation in activities and conditions that foster high levels of motivation and investment in learning (Kuh, 2001). Schaufeli et al. (2002) emphasize that SE represents a cognitive state wherein students are actively engaged in their educational journey. Furthermore, Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) define engagement as the observable manifestations of motivation reflected in learners' behaviors and actions. In addition, Zepke (2017) conceptualizes SE as a multidimensional learner-centered construct centered around actions students take, the thoughts they develop, and the emotions they experience when learning, and one that educators can actively cultivate through pedagogical choices. Zepke's (2017) definition emphasizes engagement as a multidimensional psychological experience, rather than singular behaviors. It accounts for how internal factors like emotions, beliefs and perceptions interact with observable actions to drive overall engagement.

#### *2.1.1 Dimensions of SE*

While most researchers agree that SE is multidimensional, there are some disagreements around how many dimensions it involves. Appleton et al., (2008) and Fredricks et al. (2004) view engagement as involving three distinct but interconnected dimensions: behavioral, affective, and cognitive. On the other hand, Reeve and Tseng (2011) added a fourth dimension, namely agentic engagement. Although different studies have identified slightly varying numbers of dimensions, there are theoretical and empirical agreements that the dimensions are overlapping rather than distinct (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve, 2012; Appleton et al. 2008). Building on previous studies, this study draws on Bowden's et al. (2019) model of engagement. Bowden et al. (2019) propose a multidimensional framework consisting of four key aspects of engagement including affective, social, behavior and cognitive engagement (Figure 1)



**Figure 1.** Model of engagement (adapted from Bowden et al. (2019))

First, emotional engagement captures the student's feelings about the learning situation, activities, and social context (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). It encompasses aspects of both facilitative emotions (e.g., enjoyment, enthusiasm, interest) and debilitating emotions (e.g., boredom, anxiety, frustration) (Dewaele & Li, 2021). Second, social engagement refers to the interactions and collaborations that comprise the learning process. It encompasses aspects such as communication with peers and instructors, participation in group projects, and building relationships within the academic community (Bowden et al., 2019). Third, behavioral engagement refers to the observable actions and participation of students in academic and extracurricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). It encompasses aspects such as the quantity of learner production, voluntary involvement, persistence, time management, and responses like raising hands (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Finally, Cognitive engagement represents mental investment processes, wherein learners direct attention and thought towards goals (Fredricks et al., 2004). This involves questioning, hesitation, repetition, private speech, non-verbal cues, and interaction quality demonstrated through idea exchanges, feedback provision, and explanations (Hiver et al., 2020).

### 2.1.2 Importance of SE

Engagement levels in students are strongly correlated with their current academic achievements and can predict long-term educational milestones such as high school graduation and college enrollment (Christenson et al., 2012). Moreover, engaged students are more likely to participate actively in class, absorb information more effectively, and achieve higher academic standards (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). In addition, engaged students tend to experience better overall well-being. When students are engaged, they often feel more satisfied, supported, and connected to their learning environment, contributing to their psychological and emotional health (Christenson et al., 2012). Also, they are better equipped to handle stress and setbacks, which contributes to their overall success and well-being (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Moreover, when students are engaged, they interact more frequently and meaningfully with their instructors, which strengthens their social connections and creates a more supportive learning environment (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). Furthermore, engagement is closely tied to the development of

critical thinking skills. Engaged students are more likely to engage in deep, analytical thinking and problem-solving, which are essential components of the learning process and contribute to higher-quality education (Carini et al., 2006). Finally, engaged students tend to perform better academically, which reflects positively on the institution's educational standards and effectiveness (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015)

## 2.2 *Teacher Enthusiasm (TE)*

While TE plays an important role in student learning, there is no agreement on how to define it precisely (Kunter et al., 2011). The ambiguity around defining TE may stem from the fact that it has been studied over multiple decades by researchers from various fields, like education and educational psychology (Keller et al., 2014), who approach the concept from different perspectives than EFL teachers

Starting with the term itself, Oxford dictionary defines enthusiasm as "a strong feeling of excitement and interest in something and a desire to become involved in it" while psychology refers to it as "radiating excitement" (Frenzel et al., 2019). Patrick et al. (2000) described TE as an energizing force that sparks students' curiosity and eagerness to learn. On the other hand, Kunter et al. (2011) categorized enthusiasm as an emotional-behavioral quality of educators, comprising both the learner's sense of pleasure, enjoyment, and interest, as well as specific teaching activities that foster these emotions within an educational context.

### 2.2.1 Aspects of TE

Keller et al. (2016) and Frenzel et al., (2009) identified that TE is composed of two interrelated but distinct facets. The first dimension is referred to as "experienced enthusiasm". This internal experience captures the positive feelings of excitement, enjoyment, and passion that a teacher derives from the acts of teaching and interacting with their students. The second facet is termed "displayed enthusiasm". In contrast to the internal experience, this refers to the outward expression and behaviors through which a teacher's enthusiasm manifests itself visibly in the classroom, involving the behavioral outward manifestation of those enthused feelings projected through the teacher's instructional style and demeanor. Together, these two components comprise the multifaceted construct of TE.

However, in order to engage in meaningful research related to TE, it is important to establish a clear and precise definition of what is intended by TE. Utilizing insights from psychology and educational literature, in this research, the term TE denotes the positive emotional experiences of educators with their instructional behavior and personality trait (Keller et al., 2014). Instructional behavior entails teacher's expressive and nonverbal behaviors that demonstrate enthusiasm as an instructional technique. Its emphasis is on gestures, voice tone, facial expressions etc. On the other hand, personality trait entails a teacher's innate positive emotions and enjoyment of teaching. In other words, it emphasizes their genuine enthusiasm and pleasure in their profession as an inherent quality or trait.

### 2.2.2 Importance of TE

TE appears to yield favorable outcomes across a spectrum of student achievements (Palmer,

2020; Peng, 2021; Keller et al., 2013). Research has found that teachers who exhibit high levels of enthusiasm, through their expressed passion and energy for teaching, tend to have students who are more highly motivated and engaged in the learning process (Kunter, 2011; Patrick et al., 2000). Moreover, enthusiastic teachers create a motivated learning environment that fosters curiosity, interest, and a desire to learn (Patrick et al., 2000; Frenzel et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2014; Lazarides et al., 2019). Beyond academic success, TE also plays a crucial role in promoting students' emotional well-being. Enthusiastic teachers create a positive and supportive classroom environment where students feel valued and respected (Peng, 2021). This positive atmosphere can reduce anxiety, enhance self-esteem, and foster a sense of autonomy and belonging among students (Cui et al., 2017). Dincer (2014) contended that most EFL students feel a sense of autonomy when their perspectives are considered and are afforded some decision-making power regarding course-related matters. Finally, TE has consistently demonstrated its capacity to generate positive effects on student attitudes (Keller et al., 2016; Lazarides et al., 2019). Enthusiastic teachers promote engagement in their students (Peng, 2021). When an enthusiastic teacher provides students with a variety of options related to classroom activities, homework assignments, and methods of lesson delivery, it can increase SE (Reeve et al., 2004). Moreover, TE can increase students' self-assurance in their learning journey (Ulmanen et al., 2016).

### *2.3 Studies on TE and SE*

Research on the connection between TE and SE has expanded significantly in recent years, with numerous studies examining these relationships through both quantitative and qualitative methods (Frenzel et al., 2018; Frommelt et al., 2021; Zhang, 2014; Tran & Lee, 2022; Safdari, 2022). These studies consistently show a deep interconnection between TE and student engagement, where each influences the other in significant ways. For example, Frenzel et al. (2018) conducted a study in Germany, finding that TE positively influenced students' enjoyment (emotional engagement) of mathematics, which in turn boosted TE. This emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between TE and student engagement. Also, Frommelt et al. (2021) found that TE enhanced SE through autonomy and social support. On the other hand, Revell and Wainwright (2009) found that geography TE was key to engaging students and encouraging deep learning. Similarly, Zhang (2014) expanded this by studying the effects of instructor enthusiasm on various aspects of student engagement, goal orientation, and self-efficacy among basic communication classes students. The study revealed that TE significantly enhances students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, as well as their academic self-efficacy. Together, these studies illustrate the powerful cycle between TE and student engagement. However, there is widespread agreement that the impact of teaching practices on student results depends heavily on the subject being taught (Baumert et al., 2010). While the connection between TE and SE is established among communication (Zhang, 2014), geography (Revell & Wainwright, 2009) and mathematics (Frenzel et al., 2018; Frommelt et al., 2021) students, the specific ways in which this influence occurs may differ within the context of EFL students.

Therefore, Dewaele and Li (2021) conducted a study among Chinese EFL learners using a mixed methods approach, revealing that TE had a substantial positive effect on student

enjoyment and engagement through reducing negative emotions such as boredom. The study emphasized the contagious nature of TE, which elevated students' positive emotions and overall engagement. Similarly, Aljehani, (2022) concluded that when teachers show enthusiasm, it creates an environment that increases EFL students' enjoyment, thereby enhancing their engagement. Tran and Lee (2022) investigated the impact of TE on EFL students in Vietnam. They found that enthusiastic teachers fostered a more engaging and motivating learning environment. Students responded positively to enthusiastic teaching and felt that it made the classroom atmosphere safer, more relaxed, and more confidence-boosting. On the other hand, Safdari (2022) explored the link between perceived TE and learner engagement in Iranian L2 contexts. This study revealed that enthusiastic teaching enhanced students' enjoyment, perceived teacher quality, and feelings of security, indicating that enthusiasm significantly impacts learner engagement through the promotion of positive emotions.

While research has consistently demonstrated the positive influence of TE on SE among Chinese (Dewaele & Li, 2021), Vietnamese (Tran & Lee, 2022), and Iranian (Safdari, 2022) EFL students, the specific ways in which this influence manifests may differ within the unique cultural context of Saudi EFL students. Rubenstein, (2006) asserted that classroom interaction norms, students' expectations, and the relationships between teachers and students take on markedly varied forms across different sociocultural conditioning, especially when female students are involved. For example, female university students in Saudi Arabia find themselves in unique a sociocultural environment that shapes their academic experiences in EFL learning. One reason is that the culture in Saudi Arabia is traditionally hierarchical and collectivist, where an individual's successes or failures can be seen as reflective of their community. Consequently, obedience to authority figures, such as instructors, is expected as a social norm (Alrabai, 2018). Thus, the unique social and cultural influences shaping the educational environments and expectations of learners could potentially lead to variations in their perceptions, motivations, and experiences within the EFL classroom.

#### *2.4 Manifestations of TE in the Classroom*

TE plays a multifaceted role in enhancing student engagement, as evidenced by various studies that explore how it manifests in different educational contexts. Revell and Wainwright (2009) emphasize that in higher education, enthusiastic teaching is closely tied to methods that build rapport and foster approachability. Lecturers who demonstrate enthusiasm create an informal, supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable asking questions. By using real-world examples and personal stories, these lecturers make the subject matter more relatable, while their verbal and non-verbal communication reflects a deep personal investment in the topic, thereby promoting an interactive and engaging classroom environment. On the other hand, Wenström et al. (2018) examine TE in the context of Finnish vocational education and training (VET). Their findings suggest that enthusiasm in this setting is characterized by a continuous commitment to professional growth and a willingness to experiment with new teaching methods. VET teachers who exhibit enthusiasm are dedicated to improving their teaching skills and staying updated with the latest research, which drives them to design inspiring instructional techniques. This dedication not only reflects their enthusiasm but also serves to motivate students, highlighting the reciprocal nature of engagement in the classroom.

Frommelt et al. (2021) further contributes to this discussion by revealing that students perceive enthusiastic teachers as providing higher levels of support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness over time. Such teachers empower students by offering more opportunities for choice and independence in learning, boosting their confidence and competence in the subject. Moreover, these teachers foster a strong sense of belonging and connection within the classroom, both with peers and with the teacher. They also enhance the relevance of the subject by connecting mathematical concepts to real-world applications, demonstrating the practical value of what students are learning

### *2.5 Challenges in Maintaining TE*

TE is important for fostering student engagement, but various factors can significantly impact a teacher's ability to sustain this enthusiasm over time. Both Wenström et al. (2018) and Voss et al. (2023) identify key challenges that diminish TE, highlighting a complex interplay between external pressures and internal motivations. Wenström et al. (2018) identify a range of factors that weaken teachers' enthusiasm in the vocational education and training (VET) context. Among the most pressing issues are a lack of resources and education spending cuts, which lead to decreased contact hours and increased class sizes. These conditions make teachers feel inadequate, as they struggle to provide sufficient support to their students. Additionally, administrative burdens and budget cuts contribute to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about the future of VET, exacerbated by a negative workplace atmosphere marked by pessimism, lack of appreciation, and poor communication among colleagues. Organizational problems, including rigid structures, poor management, and inadequate physical work environments, further hinder teachers' ability to remain inspired and adopt new teaching methods. Furthermore, teachers face difficulties with unmotivated students who require more guidance than the limited time allows, which adds to their stress and reduces their enthusiasm. Given that this study relies exclusively on teachers' perspectives, there is a possibility of an incomplete understanding of the challenges affecting their enthusiasm. Teachers might underreport or overlook certain issues because these challenges have become so embedded in their daily routines that they go unnoticed. Since students directly experience the consequences of these challenges, their insights could highlight issues that teachers may downplay or fail to recognize. On the other hand, Voss et al. (2023) examine the challenges teachers face in maintaining enthusiasm, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. They find that increased workload, reduced positive interactions, and difficulties with students are significant factors that contribute to a decline in enthusiasm. Technical difficulties and a lack of autonomy also play a role, as teachers struggle to adapt to new demands while feeling unsupported. However, it is important to note that the challenges identified by Voss et al. (2023) may be exacerbated by the unique circumstances of the pandemic, which introduced additional stressors not typically present in pre-pandemic teaching environments.

### *2.6 Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework of this research paper draws upon two important theories: self-determination theory (SDT), (Ryan & Deci, 2017), Self-System Model of Motivational Development (SSMMD) (Skinner et al., 2009), Social-Cognitive Learning Theory (SCT),



(Bandura, 2001), and Emotional Contagion Theory (ECT), (Kong, 2022). These theories provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the relationship between TE and EFL student engagement.

### 2.6.1 Self-Determination Theory

SDT focuses on three basic psychological needs (BPN): autonomy (the desire to feel self-directed), competence (the need to feel capable), and relatedness (the need for emotional connection) (Reeve, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017; 2020). In the classroom setting, teachers' motivational approaches and strategies frequently serve as the primary source for supporting students' BPN (Reeve, 2009). In this study, it could be assumed that TE plays a key role in supporting EFL students' BPN by creating an engaging learning environment, thereby enhancing student motivation and engagement. However, SDT does not fully explain how fulfilling these needs directly translate into engagement (Dincer et al., 2019).

### 2.6.2 Self-System Model of Motivational Development

The Self-System Model of Motivational Development (SSMMD) builds on SDT to explain how BPN directly translates into engagement (Skinner et al., 2009). It includes four categories: Context (social environment), Self (self-beliefs and BPN), Action (goal-oriented behaviors), and Outcome (learning achievements) (Dincer et al., 2019). In this study, SSMMD posits that an enthusiastic teacher who fosters students BPN in the classroom through their enthusiasm creates a supportive context and foster self-beliefs that promotes EFL learners' engagement. However, one limitation of MMSSD is that it depicts only a one-way influence, rather than a reciprocal or cyclic effect. This is a limitation because teachers often adjust their enthusiasm in response to students' displayed levels of engagement or disengagement and vice versa, as concluded by Frenzel et al. (2018).

### 2.6.3 Social-Cognitive Learning Theory

Social-Cognitive Learning Theory (SCT) emphasizes the role of observational learning in behavior and introduces the concept of reciprocal determinism within it (Green & Peil, 2009). It emphasizes that human behavior is a result of constant reciprocal interactions between personal factors (beliefs, attitudes), behavioral factors (actions, skills), and environmental factors (social influences, opportunities) (Bandura (2001). In this study, SCT posits that an enthusiastic teacher serves as a model, demonstrating engaged behaviors that students may consciously adopt. While SCT highlights the importance of crucial cognitive constructs and significant social influences, it may largely neglect the role of other factors that influence human behavior, such as environmental, biological, and affective factors (e.g. enjoyment, interest) (Martin et al., 2020), which are critical in the context of TE and SE

### 2.6.4 Emotional Contagious Theory

ECT explores how emotions are unconsciously transferred between individuals through observation and mimicry (Kong, 2022). According to ECT, a teacher's enthusiasm can spread to students, leading to increased engagement as students mirror the teacher's positive emotions. In this study, ECT posits that by observing and mirroring their teacher's positive emotions, EFL

students are more likely to experience similar feelings of excitement, interest, and motivation, leading to increased engagement. While ECT highlights the emotional impact of TE, it tends to account more for the emotional status of individuals, while paying less attention to the cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects that are also crucial in student engagement.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. While the quantitative approach was utilized to obtain broad insights into students' level of engagement and their EFL classroom enthusiasm, the qualitative approach was utilized to gain profound insights into students' perspectives regarding TE.

#### *3.1 Participants and Context*

The study employed a convenience sampling approach. All the participants were female students aged between 18 to 19 years from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, studying at ELI. The study involved 202 PYP EFL participants for the quantitative phase. For the qualitative phase, there were initially 4 participants. However, due to final examinations, 2 participants withdrew, leaving only 2 participants to conduct the interviews. For the qualitative phase, a purposeful sampling technique was used. Specifically, a maximal variation sampling approach was employed to select two PYP, EFL interviewees who were expected to hold diverse perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In this case, one participant (S1) distinguished herself as a learner who is taught by an enthusiastic teacher, while another participant (S2) distinguished herself as a student who is taught by a teacher who lacks enthusiasm.

#### *3.4 Research Instruments*

##### *3.4.1 Questionnaire*

The study utilized the "Student Engagement Scale" developed by Mekki et al. (2022) to measure students' engagement (See appendix A). However, adaptations were performed on the scale to make it encompass 28 items, comprising four subscales—Cognitive, Affective, Behavioral, and Social Engagement, each with 7 items. Items were rated on a 3-point Likert scale indicating the frequency of the engagement behavior (1=Disagree, 2=Sometimes, 3=Agree). Moreover, for evaluating students' perception of EFL TE, the study incorporated an adapted version of the four-item scale originally developed by Frenzel et al. (2010) to measure student-perceived mathematics TE. These items were rephrased to align with the specific context of English language classes. Participants were asked to respond to 4 items using a 5-point Likert scale, Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 2 depict the items in the questionnaire

**Table 2.** Dimensions of SE and Perceived TE

<b>Dimensions of student engagement</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Items</b>
<b>Cognitive</b>	Items measure the level of mental effort that students devote.	1-7
<b>Behavioral</b>	Items measure the observable actions and participation behaviors that students exhibit in EFL classrooms	8-14
<b>Affective</b>	Items measure the emotional aspects a to EFL learning experiences.	15-21
<b>Social</b>	Items measures the quality of students' interactions and connections with their peers, teachers, and the broader English language learning community.	22-28
<b>Perceived TE</b>	Items measure how student perceived TE	29-32

### 3.4.2 Semi- structured Interviews

This study involved two face-to-face semi-structured interviews with two PYP, EFL students. The interview questions address the second and third research questions. The interview was used to deeply explore participants' perspectives and experiences (Dörnyei, 2007). The interview had eight main guiding questions with follow-ups questions. To ensure the interview reliability, they were held in Arabic in convenient atmosphere for the convenience of participants (Cohen et al., 2018), as Arabic is their native language.

### 3.5 Research Procedures

The questionnaire combined two existing validated scales developed by Mekki et al. (2022) and Frenzel et al. (2010). To strengthen the validity and efficiency of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by two experts in the field, and their feedback was incorporated. The questionnaire was then translated into Arabic by the researcher and validated by an expert translator. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms and sent to the EFL PYP Female students' phones. Before distributing the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 9 EFL students resembling the target population to address potential challenges related to data collection and analysis. Based on the pilot study, some problematic items were removed, and the reliability of the questionnaire was re-evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.911, indicating excellent internal consistency reliability (Dörnyei, 2007). (See table 2)

**Table 2.** Reliability Statistics

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach' alpha</b>
Cognitive Engagement	7	0.913
Affective Engagement	7	0.872
Behavioral Engagement	7	0.732
Social Engagement	7	0.867
Perceived TE	4	0.877
Overall Scale	32	0.911

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were designed to gain deeper insights into students' perspectives. The interview questions were developed based on the quantitative results and aimed to address the second and third research questions. A piloting process was conducted with an EFL student and teacher to enhance the validity and reliability of the qualitative instrument. After incorporating feedback, the finalized 8-item interview guide was developed. The interviews were conducted in Arabic to allow participants to comfortably share their viewpoints. Two individual 30–35-minute interviews were conducted. The researcher explained the study purpose, obtained verbal consent for recording, and asked each question from the guide. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, member-checking was employed, where the researcher took the findings back to participants and asked if they accurately reflected their experiences (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Data transferability was ensured by fully describing the key processes involved in carrying out the research, including data collection, sampling techniques, and qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures (Merriam, 1998).

### *3.6 Data Analysis*

#### *3.6.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Data*

The questionnaire responses were saved as an Excel sheet and then transferred into SPSS software. Extensive statistical analyses were conducted, including descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics. Bivariate correlations using Pearson's correlation analysis examined relationships between TE and student engagement. Regression analysis further investigated relationships and potential predictive effects between the variables. The results were presented in tabular form, accompanied by interpretations.

#### *3.6.2 Analysis of Interview Data*

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews underwent thematic analysis. The Arabic recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were carefully translated into English. The translated transcripts were thoroughly read and re-read multiple times to gain familiarity and identify emerging themes. After completing all the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed. The transcribed data was then analyzed using a thematic approach (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This approach involved identifying themes within the data that corresponded to dominant ideas and concepts that emerged, which were informed by the research questions.

### *3.7 Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the researcher's university ethics committee. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of participating students, they were assigned codes (e.g., S1, S2) instead of using their real names, aligning with principles emphasizing the need to maintain confidentiality of participants' identities (Frankfort-Nachmias, 1992, cited in Cohen et al., 2018). Also, participants were provided with informed consent and information forms clearly explaining the purpose and procedures of the study. All digital audio files from interviews, transcripts in English and Arabic, and questionnaire responses were securely maintained on a memory stick accessible only to the primary

researcher.

## 4. Results and Findings

### 4.1 Quantitative Analysis: Results of the First Research Question

#### 4.1.1 The Relationship between TE and SE

To answer the first research question about the relationship between students' perceived TE and their engagement in the EFL classroom, the student engagement scale, encompassing four subscales (cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social) was first administered to 202 respondents. The responses were evaluated for mean, standard deviation, and the degree of agreement. First, respondents generally agreed with the statements in the Cognitive Engagement subscale, as indicated by high degrees of agreement for most items. The item with the highest mean score was Item 1 ("When I study English, I try to understand the material better...") with a mean of 2.51 and a high degree of agreement. (see table 1)

**Table 1.** Cognitive Engagement

Item NO.		Disagre e	Sometimes	Agree	MEAN	STDV
1	N	32	34	136	2.51	0.75
	%	15.8	16.8	67.3		
2	N	36	55	111	2.37	0.77
	%	17.8	27.2	55		
3	N	38	48	116	2.38	0.78
	%	18.8	23.8	57.4		
4	N	47	52	103	2.27	0.81
	%	23.3	25.7	51		
5	N	42	48	112	2.34	0.80
	%	20.8	23.8	55.4		
6	N	38	51	113	2.37	0.78
	%	18.8	25.2	56		
7	N	38	53	111	2.36	0.78
	%	18.8	26.2	55		
Total					2.37	0.68

Second, the Affective Engagement subscale showed moderate degrees of agreement across all items. Item 1 ("I am very interested in learning English") scored the highest in this category with a mean of 2.38. (see table 2)

**Table 2.** Affective Engagement

Item NO.		Disagre e	Sometimes	Agree	MEAN	STDV
1	N	41	43	118	2.38	0.80
	%	20.3	21.3	58.4		
2	N	47	63	92	2.22	0.80
	%	23.3	31.2	45.5		
3	N	43	60	99	2.27	0.79
	%	21.3	29.7	49		
4	N	82	53	67	2.07	0.85
	%	40.6	26.2	33.2		
5	N	48	52	102	2.26	0.82
	%	23.8	25.7	50.5		
6	N	54	55	93	2.19	0.83
	%	26.7	27.2	46		
7	N	49	44	109	2.29	0.83
	%	24.3	21.8	54		
Total					2.24	0.61

Third, in the Behavioral Engagement subscale, items generally received high degrees of agreement, particularly items 1 to 3. However, items 4 to 7 showed moderate agreement, with item 4 ("When I'm in the English class, I just act like I'm working") having the lowest mean of 2.21. (see table 3)

**Table 3.** Behavioral Engagement

Item NO.		Disagree	Sometimes	Agree	MEAN	STDV
1	N	34	33	135	2.5	0.76
	%	16.8	16.3	66.8		
2	N	37	32	133	2.47	0.78
	%	18.3	15.8	65.8		
3	N	32	39	131	2.49	0.75
	%	15.8	19.3	64.9		
4	N	104	38	60	2.21	0.87
	%	51.5	18.8	29.7		
5	N	103	30	69	2.16	0.90
	%	51	14.9	34.2		
6	N	80	58	64	2.07	0.84
	%	39.6	28.7	31.7		
7	N	52	47	103	2.25	0.84
	%	25.7	23.3	51		
Total					2.31	0.51

Finally, the Social Engagement subscale exhibited high degrees of agreement for most items,

with Item 5 ("In the English class, I respect my classmates and teachers") having the highest mean of 2.73. (see table 4)

**Table 4.** Social Engagement

Item NO.		Disagree	Sometimes	Agree	MEAN	STDV
1	N	42	55	105	2.31	0.79
	%	20.8	27.2	52		
2	N	48	53	101	2.26	0.81
	%	23.8	26.2	50		
3	N	14	34	154	2.69	0.59
	%	6.9	16.8	76.2		
4	N	24	38	140	2.57	0.69
	%	11.9	18.8	69.3		
5	N	17	19	166	2.73	0.60
	%	8.4	9.4	82.2		
6	N	21	39	142	2.59	0.67
	%	10.4	19.3	70.3		
7	N	20	31	151	2.64	0.65
	%	9.9	15.3	74.8		
Total					2.54	0.51

#### 4.1.2 Perceived TE

The perceived TE scale was administered to measure EFL students' perceptions of their teacher's enthusiasm. The results showed that item 1 ("Our English teacher teaches with enthusiasm") received the highest degree of agreement, with a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 1.18 with 51.5% of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement. However, item 2 ("Our English teacher is humorous during teaching") had the lowest mean of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 1.28, with 41.6% of respondents strongly agreeing. (see table 5)

**Table 5.** Perceived TE scale

Item NO.	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	STDV
1	N 8	21	23	46	104	4.07	1.18
	% 4	10.4	11.4	22.8	51.5		
2	N 14	23	35	46	84	3.80	1.28
	% 6.9	11.4	17.3	22.8	41.6		
3	N 15	21	26	40	100	3.93	1.30
	% 7.4	10.4	12.9	19.8	49.5		
4	N 13	23	32	38	96	3.89	1.29
	% 6.4	11.4	15.8	18.8	47.5		
Total						3.92	1.08

SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, N= neutral, A=agree, ST= strongly agree, M= mean, STDV= standard deviation.

These results suggest that many students perceive their English teacher as enthusiastic and engaging, as evidenced by the high mean scores and the high percentage of students strongly agreeing with the items.

#### 4.1.3 Correlation among Study Scales

The statistical analysis revealed significant positive correlations between all aspects of SE (cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social) and perceived TE in the EFL classrooms. Firstly, all the correlations were found to be positive and statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level. Examining the strength of these correlations, cognitive engagement showed a moderate positive correlation with perceived TE ( $r = 0.431, p < 0.001$ ). Affective engagement was strongly correlated with perceived TE ( $r = 0.594, p < 0.001$ ). Behavioral engagement showed a moderate positive correlation with perceived TE ( $r = 0.487, p < 0.001$ ). Finally, social engagement had a moderate positive correlation with perceived TE ( $r = 0.376, p < 0.001$ ). (see table 6)

**Table 6.** Correlation matrix of All scales.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. perceived TE	3.92	1.08	-			
2.Cognitive Engagement	2.67	0.63	.431**			
3.Affective Engagement	2.24	0.61	.594**	.588**		
4.Behavioral Engagement	2.31	0.51	.487**	.440**	.592**	
5.Social Engagement	2.54	0.52	.376**	.223**	.273**	.258**

To complement these findings, the mean scores, standard deviations, and full correlation matrix between all variables are presented in table 6. This allowed for assessment of not only the direction and significance of relationships, but also the strength of all bivariate correlations simultaneously. These results suggest that perceptions of TE are significantly related to students' engagement across all engagement dimensions, with affective engagement showing the strongest relationship.

#### 4.1.4 The Impact of Perceived TE on SE

The regression analyses investigated the effect of perceived TE on four different dependent variables: cognitive engagement, affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and social engagement. First, Perceived TE explained 18.6% of the variance in cognitive engagement (Adjusted R Square = 0.182). (see table 8). Second, Affective Engagement showed the highest influence from perceived TE, with an Adjusted R Square of 0.350, indicating that 35% of the variance in affective engagement was explained by TE. (see table 8). For behavioral engagement, perceived TE accounted for 23.3% of the variance (Adjusted R Square = 0.233). (see table 8). Finally, Perceived TE had the least influence on social engagement, with an Adjusted R Square of 0.137, meaning that 13.7% of the variance in social engagement was explained by it. (see table 7)



**Table 7.** liner regression analysis

Dependent Variable	Adjusted R Square	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Significance (p-value)
Cognitive Engagement	0.182	0.431	0.254	< 0.001
Affective Engagement	0.350	0.594	0.339	< 0.001
Behavioral Engagement	0.233	0.487	0.230	< 0.001
Social Engagement	0.137	0.376	0.180	< 0.001
Overall	.404	.638	.251	< .001

When comparing these results, affective engagement (e.g. enjoyment or interest) emerges as the most influenced by perceived teacher enthusiasm, as indicated by the highest Adjusted R Square value of 0.350. This is followed by behavioral engagement (0.233), cognitive engagement (0.182), and social engagement (0.137), in terms of the variance explained by teacher enthusiasm.

## 4.2 Qualitative Analysis

### 4.2.1 Results of the Second and Third Research Questions

Three major themes presented themselves consistently throughout two different interviews alongside the online surveys. The themes included (1) TE and its impact on student engagement, (2) TE manifestation, and (3) Challenges for teachers in maintaining enthusiasm.

#### **Theme 1: TE and its Influence on EFL SE**

##### a) Increased participation vs. Reduced Participation

TE plays an important role in fostering an environment where students feel encouraged and motivated to participate. When teachers exhibit excitement and passion for the subject matter, it not only captures students' attention but also inspires them to engage more actively in the learning process.

*"When my teacher shows excitement about the lesson, it makes me want to participate more. I feel like I can contribute and that my input is valued [...] I find myself way more eager to volunteer answers, ask questions" (S1).*

On the other hand, a lack of enthusiasm from the teacher can lead to a more passive and less engaged student experience

*"[my teacher] does not seem very excited about the material, so it is hard to stay focused or*

*feel motivated to participate. I usually just sit quietly and listen, and I do not feel as comfortable raising my hand, even if I know the answer." (S2)*

#### b) Motivation and enjoyment

Participants frequently mentioned that their motivation to learn and enjoy the subject matter was significantly influenced by their teacher's enthusiasm. The energy and passion that teachers brought into the classroom often made even challenging or less interesting topics more engaging. Students expressed that when their teacher seemed genuinely excited about the material, it not only made the lessons more enjoyable but also motivated them to put in more effort and stay committed to their studies. Some of their statements are as follows:

*"When [my teacher] is enthusiastic, I actually enjoy the class more. [...] their excitement makes the subject come alive, and suddenly it is not just about memorizing facts. I feel more motivated to do well because I do not want to disappoint them, and also because it is fun to learn in that kind of environment." (S1)*

*"Honestly, when [my teacher] is not really into it and does not seem to care if we participate or not, it makes me less likely to participate too. It is kind of, "What is the point?" But to be fair, I mostly learn English through my phone and apps, not really from school. So, her enthusiasm does not really affect my overall motivation to learn English" (S2).*

These contrasting accounts illustrate how a teacher's level of enthusiasm can have a significant impact on student motivation and enjoyment. For S1, the enthusiastic teacher creates an engaging and dynamic classroom atmosphere that makes learning more enjoyable and motivating. In contrast, S2, taught by a less enthusiastic teacher, experiences a more routine and less engaging environment, leading to lower motivation and less enjoyment in the learning process.

#### c) Developing relationships

TE was also found to play a key role in developing relationships between teachers and students. Participants noted that when a teacher is enthusiastic, it can create a more positive and open environment, leading to stronger connections. Below are the perspectives of two students:

*"My teacher's enthusiasm makes it feel like they really care about what they are teaching and about us as students. It is not just about getting through the material[...] they make an effort to connect with us. I feel like I can approach them with questions or even just talk about the lesson. It is like they are more than just a teacher—they are someone who is genuinely interested in helping us learn." (S1)*

*"There is definitely a distance between us and the teacher. [The teacher] is professional and all, but I do not feel like I have that kind of relationship where I could just ask questions or talk about something outside of the lesson. It is not that [my teacher] is unapproachable, but I guess I just do not feel that same level of connection [...] it is more formal, if that makes sense." (S2)*

These differing experiences highlight how TE can foster stronger relationships in the classroom. The participant S1 feels a greater sense of connection and support, leading to a more

collaborative and comfortable learning environment. On the other hand, the participant S2 experiences a more formal and distant relationship, which can create a barrier to open communication and connection.

#### e) Distraction and Overwhelming

While TE generally has positive effects, some students noted that excessive enthusiasm can sometimes become overwhelming and distracting, making it difficult to focus on the lesson. This subtheme captures the balance between being engaging and being overwhelming.

*"I really appreciate how enthusiastic my teacher is, but sometimes it feels like there is too much going on [...] it is hard to keep up, and I end up feeling overwhelmed, like I am missing out on the main points because I am trying to follow all the excitement. It is entertaining, but I leave the class feeling a bit drained and confused because I could not keep track of everything we covered." (S1)*

This perspective highlights the fine line between enthusiasm that engages and enthusiasm that overwhelms.

#### f) Enthusiasm is Contagious

Many participants noted that a teacher's enthusiasm could be contagious, positively influencing their own attitudes and engagement in the classroom.

*"You can just feel the energy when my teacher starts the lesson. Even if I am not in the mood, [my teacher's] enthusiasm kind of pulls me in [...] I see how much they care about what they are teaching, and it makes me want to care too. I find myself getting excited about topics I never thought I would be interested in, just because they are so into it [...] when she gets excited about a topic or activity, it really gets us engaged as well." (S1)*

On the other hand, Student S2 finds that the lack of enthusiasm creates a more passive learning environment, where students are less motivated to engage deeply.

*"The lack of enthusiasm from my teacher kind of sets the tone for the whole class. We all just go through the motions. I just do what I need to do, but I do not feel that same drive to really dive into the material [...] when she is not really into it and does not seem to care if we participate or not, it makes me less likely to participate too " (S2)*

These responses illustrate how TE can spread throughout the classroom, influencing students' own levels of interest and engagement

### 4.2.2 Theme 2: TE Manifestation

#### a) Varied vocal tones

One of the most noticeable manifestations of TE is the use of varied vocal tones during instruction. Participants demonstrated how the modulation of voice, including changes in pitch, volume, and pace, can capture students' attention and enhance their engagement.

*"One thing I love about my teacher is how her voice always changes. She will get louder when*

*something is exciting or important, and then she will slow down and speak softer when she wants us to really think about something. It is like she is telling a story" (S1)*

On the other hand, S2's experience with a monotone delivery leads to a more monotonous and less engaging classroom environment.

*"My teacher usually speaks in the same tone, and it does not really change much [...] and after a while, it is hard to stay focused while she is reading from the slides" (S2)*

This highlights how varied vocal tones can significantly enhance the learning experience by making lessons more engaging and dynamic. The use of varied vocal tones can thus play a crucial role in maintaining student interest and fostering active participation.

#### b) Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is a significant way in which TE manifests in the classroom. Participants emphasized how enthusiastic teachers use encouragement and rewards to enhance their motivation and engagement. The following perspectives from two students illustrate how positive reinforcement impacts their learning experience:

*" [my teacher] is always engaging with us, asking questions, and encouraging discussions [...] whenever I answer a question or contribute to a discussion, my teacher always has something encouraging to say, even if I am not completely right. It makes me feel more confident and willing to participate because I know they appreciate my effort." (S1)*

On the other hand, another student explained that the lack of positive reinforcement results in a more disengaged learning experience, where the student does not feel particularly motivated or excited to participate in class.

*"My teacher does not really give much feedback unless it is correcting something. I do not feel discouraged, but I also do not feel particularly excited to speak up because I am not sure if what I say will even be acknowledged." (S2)*

#### c) Moving around classroom vs. standing static

The physical movement of a teacher in the classroom appeared to be a key aspect of how enthusiasm can be manifested. Participants elaborated on how a teacher's mobility—whether moving around the classroom or remaining static—affects their engagement and interaction.

*"My teacher is always moving around the classroom, interacting with us, and checking in on what we are doing [...] and I feel more connected to what is going on because they are not just standing still at the front." (S1)*

*"My teacher mostly stays at the front of the room and does not really move around much. It makes the class feel a bit stiff and formal." (S2)*

#### d) Incorporating fun activities/discussions

Incorporating fun activities and engaging discussions is another way in which TE can be expressed in the classroom. One participant described how the inclusion of interactive and

enjoyable elements in lessons can enhance SE and create a more vibrant learning environment.

*"We are always doing something different in class—whether it is group discussions, games, or projects. My teacher really knows how to make learning fun, and it makes me look forward to the lessons because I know we are going to do something interesting." (S1)*

In contrast, a more traditional and less interactive approach results in a less dynamic classroom atmosphere

*"Most of our classes are just lectures with some Q&A. There are not many activities or discussions that really get us involved" (S2)*

#### e) Remembering student names

One of the subtler yet impactful ways TE can manifest is through the effort to remember and use students' names. Participants explained how this personal touch can foster a stronger connection between teacher and student, enhancing the learning environment. Below are reflections from two students with different experiences in this regard:

*"It might seem like a small thing, but my teacher always remembers our names and uses them when they call on us or give feedback. It makes me feel seen and valued in the class. (S1)*

*"My teacher does not always remember our names, and it feels like they are just addressing the class as a whole most of the time. Most of the time, it is just 'you' or 'everyone,' (S2)*

This illustrates how the simple act of remembering and using students' names can significantly contribute to a more engaging and supportive classroom atmosphere.

#### f) Humor and Personal Disclosures

TE can also be conveyed through the use of appropriate humor and sharing personal disclosures. Participants described how humor and personal stories can make lessons more engaging and relatable, fostering a positive learning environment. The experiences of two students with different levels of TE provide insight into the impact of these practices.

*"My teacher often shares personal stories that relate to the lesson. It makes the class much more enjoyable and less intimidating. It feels like they are more approachable (S1)*

*" Plus, I think [enthusiastic teachers] are more likely to use humor, but our teacher does not really do that. The classes are very focused on the content without much personal interaction" (S2)*

#### g) Connections to Personal Interests

Integrating connections to students' personal interests is a crucial way in which TE can be manifested in the classroom. Participants demonstrated how relating lesson content to their hobbies, preferences, and real-life interests can enhance engagement and make learning more relevant. The following contrasting insights from two students illustrate how these connections impact their classroom experience

*"[The teacher] even let us choose topics for our writing based on our interests, like our homes*

*or favorite places [...] Another thing she does is if someone brings up an interesting topic, she really gets into it and wants to know more". (S1)*

In contrast, a more conventional approach results in a less personalized and more detached classroom experience.

*"The lessons and assignments are mostly based on textbook content that do not always connect to what I am interested in. (S2)*

#### 4.2.3 Theme 3: Teachers' Challenges for Maintaining Enthusiasm

Maintaining enthusiasm in the classroom can be challenging for teachers due to various factors that impact their ability to sustain a high level of engagement. Students are often aware of the challenges their teachers face in maintaining enthusiasm in the classroom. This theme delves into how students perceive these challenges, identifying key factors such as lack of student interest, heavy workload, emotional labor, and teacher burnout. These sub-themes provide insight into how students recognize the impact of these challenges on their teachers and, subsequently, on their own learning experience.

##### a) Lack of Interest, Motivation, or Effort from Some Students

One significant challenge that teachers face, as observed by students, is the lack of interest, motivation, or effort from some students. The participants emphasized how they perceive the impact of their own and that of their peers' disengagement on their teachers' enthusiasm. The following perspectives from two students, each taught by teachers with varying levels of enthusiasm, illustrate this dynamic:

*"I can tell that my teacher puts a lot of energy into making the class interesting, but it is clear they get frustrated when some students do not put in the effort [...] you can see it affects them when some students are not paying attention or playing with their phones. For me, I try to stay engaged because I know they are working hard." (S1)*

*"I have noticed that our teacher does not seem very interested, probably because they can tell most of us are not either, or the opposite. When we do not show interest, it seems like the teacher gives up trying to make the class engaging [...] it is like a cycle—we are not engaged, so the teacher's enthusiasm drops, which makes us even less interested". (S2)*

##### b) Workload and Emotional Distress

Another significant challenge that students perceive as affecting their teachers' ability to maintain enthusiasm is the heavy workload associated with teaching. Participants delved into how they recognize the impact of their teachers' responsibilities, such as lesson planning, grading, and administrative duties, on their energy levels and classroom engagement. The perspectives of two students shed light on this issue

*"There are days when they seem a bit more drained, probably because of all the work they have to handle [...] They have mentioned staying up late to grade papers. [...] Even though they try to keep up their enthusiasm, I think the stress of all the work they have to do makes it hard sometimes". (S1)*

*"I think she tries her best, but it can be disheartening when students do not seem interested. I have noticed that [my teacher] sometimes looks a bit discouraged when that happens [...] the combination of all [my teacher's] responsibilities and the emotional distress of being pregnant must be really tough, and it shows in the classroom. (S2)*

### c) Class Timing

The timing of classes is another factor that students perceive as affecting their teachers' ability to maintain enthusiasm. Early morning classes, late afternoon sessions, or back-to-back classes can be particularly challenging for teachers, impacting their energy levels and engagement. Participants asserted how they notice the influence of class timing on their teachers' enthusiasm and the overall classroom atmosphere.

*"I also imagine the time of day the class is held could definitely impact a teacher's ability to sustain enthusiasm [...] our teacher has the first class of the day, and honestly, I do not know how they do it. I think it must be tough to be that enthusiastic and excited first thing in the morning [...] sometimes we have a late afternoon class, which I know can be tiring " (S1)*

*"Our English class lasts four hours, and that is a long time for anyone to stay focused [...] the lessons start off okay, but by the end, everyone is just tired (S2)*

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of TE on EFL student engagement. Specifically, it aimed to examine the relationship between student perceptions of TE and their engagement, explore how teachers demonstrate enthusiasm, and identify challenges of sustaining enthusiasm through students' perspectives. This section provides an in-depth discussion of the research findings in relation to the research questions, offering further interpretation and discussing them in relation to the existing literature

### 5.1 First Research Question

RQ1: What is the relationship between PYP students' perceptions of TE and their engagement in the EFL classroom?

The results revealed that students' perceptions of their teacher's enthusiasm level positively predicted their engagement. This finding replicates the prior arguments highlighting the desirable functions of TE in the classroom (Zhang, 2014; Frenzel et al., 2009; Tran & Le, 2022). Interestingly, the results indicate that TE has a stronger predicting effect on students' affective engagement (e.g. interest, enjoyment or anxiety) compared to behavioral, cognitive, and social engagement. The findings differ from those of Frommelt et al. (2021), who concluded that behavioral engagement among students was most increased by teacher enthusiasm. There are three explanations for this variation in results. The first explanation is that while enthusiastic teachers can motivate students to participate and behave actively in class, students may still exhibit expected behaviors—such as following rules, paying attention, avoiding trouble, and completing assignments—regardless of the teacher's enthusiasm. This is because these

behaviors are often linked directly to their grades. In other words, students might engage in these behaviors primarily to achieve good grades, rather than because they are inspired by the teacher's enthusiasm. Therefore, even if a teacher is unenthusiastic, students may still behave appropriately and complete their work to ensure academic success, indicating that behavioral engagement may be driven more by external factors like grades rather than by the teacher's enthusiasm. Another explanation might be linked to the concept of emotional contagion (Kong, 2022). Students are likely to emotionally engage if they believe that the teacher is passionate about the subject matter and shares their enthusiasm. This can help to create a positive and supportive learning environment, which can lead to increased motivation and engagement. This aligns with Dewaele and Li (2021), who asserted that TE is contagious and affects students' emotions and engagement. The third potential explanation for the disagreement could be attributed to differences in the specific population studied, or the contexts in which the studies were conducted. Rubenstein, (2006) discussed how educational expectations can differ significantly depending on varying sociocultural contexts around the world. Classroom norms, the nature of teacher-student relationships, and student attitudes are all molded in distinctive ways according to the cultural conditioning within different educational systems.

On the other hand, the qualitative findings indicated that excessive enthusiasm may adversely affect students' engagement. The possible explanation is that there are different levels of enthusiasm. Excessive enthusiasm, while well-intentioned, can trigger negative emotional responses, particularly in those who may be more introverted or culturally inclined to prefer subdued emotional expressions (Rubenstein, 2006). For example, in the Saudi culture, where maintaining harmony and not exceeding social expectations are valued (Alrabai, 2018), extreme displays of enthusiasm may be perceived as overwhelming or insincere. This can trigger negative emotional responses from students, who might feel pressure to match the teacher's high energy or perceive the enthusiasm as not genuine. Consequently, instead of feeling inspired, students might feel pressured to match the teacher's intensity or disengage entirely. Interestingly, no study has explicitly examined or reported on the effects of varying degrees of TE. It is often assumed in discussions that enthusiasm is uniformly moderate and balanced, without considering the potential impact of different levels of enthusiasm. As such, this study underscores the importance of exploring different degrees of enthusiasm and identifying the optimal level for promoting student engagement.

Moreover, the lack of enthusiasm can have a significant impact on students' engagement. When a teacher lacks enthusiasm, they may come across as disengaged or uninterested in the subject being taught. This perceived disinterest can lead to a similar response from students, creating a cycle where lack of TE leads to decreased SE, which in turn can further diminish the teacher's energy and enthusiasm. This reciprocal relationship between TE and SE is strongly supported by Frenzel et al. (2018), who found that TE and SE are dynamically interconnected, with each influencing the other over time. This relationship can be understood through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), particularly focusing on the concept of reciprocal determinism. It suggests that not only does the teacher's enthusiasm affect student engagement, but the students' level of engagement also impacts the teacher's enthusiasm. As students become less engaged, the teacher may find it harder to maintain their own enthusiasm, which can further diminish



student engagement. This cyclical interaction creates a dynamic where both the teacher's and students' behaviors and attitudes continuously influence each other, either positively or negatively.

### *5.2 Second Research Question*

RQ2: Which teaching methods lead students to perceive their teachers as enthusiastic?

Students reported that TE is expressed through different vocal tones, positive reinforcement, physical movement, fun activities, and personal connections. Additionally, remembering student names and using appropriate humor or personal anecdotes foster a supportive and relatable atmosphere. Finally, connecting lessons to students' personal interests makes learning more relevant and engaging. Collectively, these manifestations of enthusiasm contribute to a more engaging educational experience. The impact of these behaviors on SE can be further understood through the lens of the SDT and its ensuing MMSSD.

First, vocal tone and positive reinforcement directly relate to students' need for competence; one of the three basic psychological needs identified by SDT. Competence support from teachers is demonstrated through instructional practices that present students with appropriately challenging tasks, and provide meaningful feedback (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Dincer (2014) found that EFL learners also feel competent when teachers select exercises tailored to their skill levels and provide feedback on their work. Therefore, when teachers vary their vocal tone, they capture students' attention and make the material more compelling. This dynamic use of voice helps students feel more confident in their understanding and self-assurance (Ulmanen et al., 2016), thereby satisfying their need for competence. Similarly, positive reinforcement, such as encouraging words or small rewards, further boosts students' confidence, motivation, and engagement (Reeve, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This result aligns with Frommelt et al.'s (2021), who conclude that that students perceive enthusiastic teachers as providing higher levels of support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness over time.

Second, movement around the classroom, incorporating fun activities, and allowing students to choose their own topics address the need for autonomy; another core component of SDT. According to Ryan and Deci, (2020), autonomy supportive teaching occurs when instructors afford students' choices and allow them to learn and complete tasks in accordance with their individual styles and paces. Therefore, when teachers move around the classroom, engage students in interactive activities, or give them the freedom to select topics based on their interests, they empower students to take ownership of their learning. According to Dincer (2014), most EFL students experience a sense of autonomy when their perspectives are taken into account. This sense of autonomy fosters intrinsic motivation, making students more engaged (Reeve, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The SSMMD further supports this by suggesting that such autonomy-supportive practices can lead to deeper engagement and a more meaningful learning experience. This aligns with Frommelt et al.'s (2021) findings, which indicated that teacher enthusiasm boosts motivation and engagement by providing autonomy support and social support as mediating factors.

Finally, personal connections, such as remembering students' names and linking lessons to their

interests fulfill the need for social relatedness; the third basic psychological need in SDT. Social relatedness in the classroom is cultivated when teachers demonstrate respect and concern for their students and promote collaborative engagement between students (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Dincer (2014) found that EFL students experience a sense of relatedness in the classroom when supported by their peers and able to engage positively with both classmates and instructors. Therefore, when teachers remember students' names, it conveys a sense of personal recognition and care, which strengthens the student-teacher relationship. Similarly, when teachers incorporate students' interests into lessons, they make the content more relatable and meaningful, enhancing students' engagement (Reeve, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to SSMMD, these personal connections help students feel more integrated into the classroom community, which is vital for maintaining motivation and enthusiasm for learning. These findings are consistent with Revell and Wainwright (2009), who highlighted the strong connection between enthusiastic teaching and strategies that foster rapport, relatedness, and approachability. While their study focused on teacher perspectives, this research investigated student perceptions, revealing a shared understanding: both teachers and students agree that teaching methods that build rapport and approachability are perceived as enthusiastic and effective.

### *5.3 Third Research Question*

RQ3: What challenges do teachers face in maintaining their enthusiasm in the EFL classroom from the students' perspectives?

The interview addressed the third research question highlighting the challenges associated with maintaining enthusiasm in the EFL classroom from the student perspectives. The reason is that students may observe specific challenges that teachers face in maintaining enthusiasm that teachers themselves might overlook or under-report. From the students' observational standpoints, factors such as burnout, workload, personal issues, and the time of day can all influence a teacher's ability to sustain enthusiasm. These findings echo those of Voss et al. (2023), who explored obstacles to sustained enthusiasm during the pandemic from the teachers' perspectives. According to SSMMD, students' engagement is heavily influenced by the social environment, particularly the support they receive in satisfying their BPN for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When teachers struggle to maintain their enthusiasm due to challenges like burnout or heavy workloads, their ability to create a positive, engaging learning environment is compromised. This can lead to a decrease in the quality of interactions between teachers and students, which in turn can negatively affect students' motivation and engagement. Additionally, the results showed that dealing with unmotivated or troublesome students can discourage teachers and lower their enthusiasm levels. This aligns with findings from Frommelt et al. (2021), who suggested that the emotions, motivation, and engagement of both teachers and students are deeply influenced by classroom dynamics and their interactions. This indicates that students can perceive the link between their own lack of motivation or disruptive behavior and their teacher's declining enthusiasm levels. This aligns with SCT's principle of observational learning, where students observe the consequences (teacher's dampened enthusiasm) of the model behavior (unmotivated/troublesome students).

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

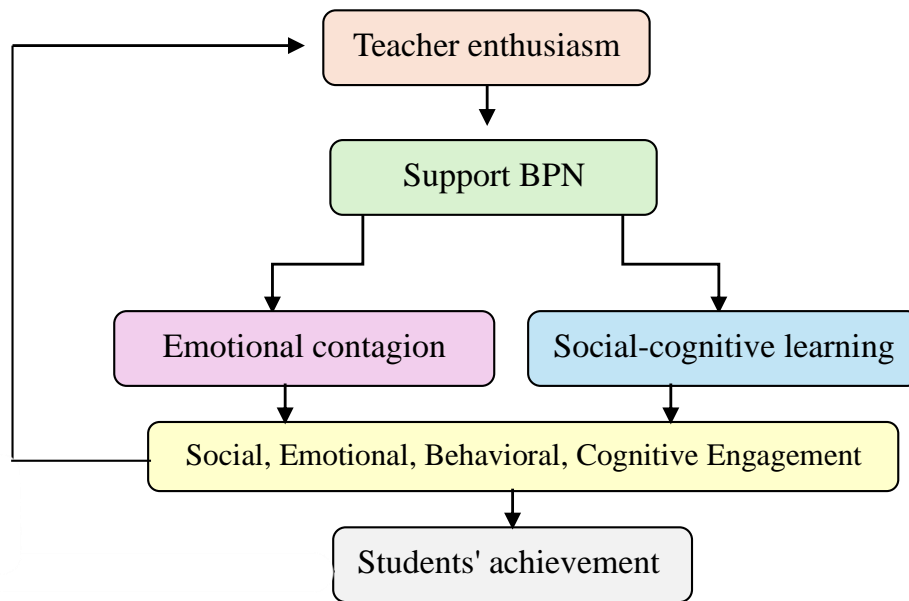
This study aimed to explore the influence of TE on SE in Saudi EFL classrooms, examining the relationship between students' perceptions of TE and their engagement, identifying teaching methods that lead students to perceive their teachers as enthusiastic, and understanding the challenges teachers face in maintaining enthusiasm from the students' perspectives. The insights gained from this research are critical for informing instructional practices and policies that enhance both teacher effectiveness and student engagement. This section concludes the study by providing pedagogical and theoretical implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

### *6.1 Pedagogical Implications*

The findings from this study offer several pedagogical implications for enhancing EFL classroom dynamics. Firstly, recognizing the significant positive correlation between TE and SE, teachers should employ varied approaches not only foster a supportive learning environment but also that emphasize the role of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in student engagement. Moreover, training programs could be offered, equipping teachers with strategies to express enthusiasm effectively and sustainably through skillful use of varied vocal tones, positive reinforcement and humor, classroom movement, fun activities. Moreover, educational institutions could offer professional development opportunities focused on strategies for managing workloads, coping with burnout, and dealing with challenging student behaviors.

### *6.2 Theoretical Implications*

Engagement is not an isolated phenomenon but rather an observable process that aligns with several motivational theories (Lee & Reeve, 2012). Given its broad relevance across different perspectives, it was important to select a suitable framework for explaining the dynamic relationship between SE and TE. The model starts with the integration of the Self-Determination theory (SDT) as a starting point, which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling students' basic physiological needs (BPN). The framework extends this foundation by incorporating the Emotional Contagious Theory (ECT) to explain how a teacher's enthusiasm and positive emotions are subconsciously mirrored by students. Additionally, the model incorporates the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to describe how students consciously observe and model their teacher's engaged behaviors. Then, the Self-System Model of Motivation (SSMMD) further elaborates on how this supportive environment enables students to develop positive self-perceptions and beliefs, which fuel their engagement and translate motivation into effective learning outcomes. Finally, the model acknowledges the cyclic nature of this relationship, where increased student engagement, in turn, enhances the teacher's enthusiasm, creating a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between teacher and students. (Figure 7)



**Figure 7.** Proposed model for understanding the influence of TE on SE

### 6.3 Limitations

Three limitations should be considered in this study. The first undeniable limitation in this study is its focus on only female students, which might impact its generalizability. The decision to include only female participants is based on the understanding that sociocultural environments and expectations for male and female Saudi Arabian EFL students may differ. These differences suggest that male and female students might need to be treated as distinct populations when investigating phenomena related to language learning. Moreover, the study relies on students' self-reports for data collection, which presents another limitation. The primary concern is that students' perceptions of their teachers' displayed enthusiasm might not accurately reflect the teachers' actual or felt enthusiasm, leading to potential discrepancies between perceived and actual enthusiasm. Finally, the study's sample size of 202 participants for the quantitative phase, and two participants for the qualitative phase presents a limitation, as it may be considered relatively small for drawing broad conclusions about the population. This sample size constraint was largely due to the data collection period coinciding with final examination schedules, which likely impacted participant availability and response rates.

### 6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the limitations and implications identified in this study, several suggestions for future research can be proposed. Future research should consider including data from EFL teachers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how TE is perceived and its impact on student engagement. Also, it is recommended that future studies replicate this research with a more diverse sample (e.g. Including male students) to improve the generalizability of the findings across different demographics.

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#### **About the Authors:**

**Maram Alghamdi** holds a Bachelor's in English Language. She is currently an MA student in TESOL at KAU, ELI, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with two years of teaching experience. She seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in TESOL, particularly in the physiological aspects of language teaching and learning.

Orchid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2319-4672>

**Dr. Hanadi Khadawardi** is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at KAU, ELI, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She was awarded a PhD in Modern Languages/Applied Linguistics from University of Southampton, UK in 2016. She was awarded an MA with Distinction in Applied Linguistics and Research Methodology from University of Southampton, UK, in 2011. Hanadi has got a CELTA (Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching for Adults) from Teaching House at OHC, London. Dr. Khadawardi's research interests include second language acquisition, learning and teaching English language, digital literacies, academic reading and writing strategies, language learning skills, the use of modern technologies and AI for language learning and teaching, pedagogical issues, instructional and curriculum design, and scientific research skills.

Orchid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2957-2649>

## Appendix A

### Student engagement scale & Perceived teacher enthusiasm scale

a 3-point Likert-type 1(never), 2 (sometimes), and 3 (always).\ agree, neutral, disagree

#### Cognitive Engagement

1. When I study English, I try to understand the material better by relating it to things I already know.
2. When learning English, I try to put the ideas in my own words.
3. I make up my own examples to help me understand the important concepts I learn in English classes.
4. When learning English lessons, I often try to associate them with what I learnt in other classes about the same or similar things.
5. I try to see the similarities and differences am I things between learning in English classes and things I know already.
6. I try to understand how the things I learn in English classes fit together with each other.
7. I try to think through the English topics and decide what I'm supposed to learn from them, rather than studying topics by just reading them over.

#### Affective Engagement

8. I am very interested in learning English.
9. I like what I am learning in school.
10. I enjoy my English class.
11. I think learning English is boring.
12. I like my English class.
13. Most mornings, I look forward to going to the English class.
14. I am happy to be in the English class.

#### Behavioral Engagement

15. I try hard to do well in the English class.
16. In the English class, I work as hard as I can.
17. I pay attention in the English class.
18. When I'm in the English class, I just act like I'm working.
19. In the English class, I do just enough to get by.
20. When I'm in the English class, my mind wanders.
21. If I have trouble understanding an English language problem, I go over it again until I understand it.

#### Social Engagement

22. In the English class, I share the same work goals as my classmates.
23. In the English class, I share the same work attitudes as my classmates.
24. In the English class, I listen and follow directions.
25. In the English class, I accept responsibilities.
26. In the English class, I respect my classmates and teachers.
27. In the English class, I handle conflicts appropriately.
28. In the English class, I work cooperatively with my classmates.

#### Student-perceived teacher enthusiasm:

5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. Our English teacher teaches with enthusiasm.
2. Our English teacher is humorous during teaching.
3. Our English teacher tries to get students excited about the subject of English.
4. Our English teacher really seems to take pleasure in teaching.

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