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The Role of Teacher-Student Relationships in Enhancing EFL Learners' Confidence and Willingness to Engage in Challenging Language Tasks

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and self-confidence (SC) are pivotal factors influencing students' willingness to engage in challenging English tasks (WECTE), particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This study explores the interplay between TSRs, SC, and WECTE in Saudi EFL classrooms. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), we examined data collected from 566 students across five Saudi universities to test four hypotheses. The results reveal significant direct and indirect relationships among the constructs. TSRs positively impact SC ($\beta = 0.853, p < 0.05$), and SC significantly enhances WECTE ($\beta = 0.587, p < 0.05$). Moreover, TSRs influence WECTE both directly ($\beta = 0.227, p < 0.05$) and indirectly through SC ($\beta = 0.501, p < 0.05$), confirming the mediating role of SC. The findings underline the critical role of TSRs in fostering SC and promoting WECTE. Practical implications include strategies for teachers to build positive relationships, such as providing constructive feedback, creating supportive environments, and encouraging risk-taking in language tasks. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on EFL education in non-Western contexts and highlights the importance of addressing both psychological and relational factors in language learning.

Keywords: Teacher-Student Relationships; Self-Confidence; Engagement; Language Learning; Challenging Tasks

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1. Introduction

Relationships are a fundamental part of human life, fostering a sense of connection and support that enhances well-being, motivation, and emotional regulation^[1-4]. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), relationships, along with autonomy and competence, are essential psychological needs that drive personal growth, healthy decision-making, and optimal functioning when fulfilled^[5]. Conversely, unmet psychological needs can hinder growth and development^[6]. Building strong relationships requires mutual understanding and alignment of values and emotions in each interaction. Interpersonal connections serve as the foundation for learning relationships, particularly in transitional contexts, where deliberate efforts are needed to establish and nurture these bonds^[7].

TSRs have long been recognized as a cornerstone of effective education, influencing a wide range of academic and psychological outcomes^[4,8]. In classrooms where students face significant learning challenges, such as those in EFL contexts, TSRs play an especially vital role. Positive TSRs, characterized by mutual respect, trust, and empathy, create a supportive environment conducive to student engagement, confidence-building, and academic success^[9]. The importance of these relationships extends beyond fundamental classroom dynamics, as they influence learners' willingness to attempt challenging tasks, a critical component of mastering a foreign language^[10].

In education, good TSRs have a substantial impact on learning. They encourage students to stay engaged, build resilience, and persist in achieving their goals^[9,11]. These positive connections reduce anxiety, promote a sense of belonging, and help students take on challenges with confidence^[12,13]. For instance, students who feel supported by their teachers are more likely to participate actively and overcome setbacks^[13,14].

Learning EFL is particularly challenging, especially in contexts where English is not commonly spoken outside academic settings^[15,16]. Saudi university students, particularly those in their first year, face the dual challenges of adapting to university life and developing English proficiency, which is crucial for academic success. These pressures often result in heightened anxiety and a fear of failure, which can hinder

students' engagement in tasks like speaking, writing, and reading critically^[9,17,18]. In this context, TSRs play a crucial role in supporting students as they address these challenges. Supportive TSRs have the potential to alleviate anxiety and encourage students to embrace challenges as chances for progress^[19-21].

Among the psychological factors influenced by TSRs, self-confidence (SC) holds particular significance. SC, often conceptualized through Bandura's theory of self-efficacy^[22], represents a student's confidence in their capacity to accomplish tasks and reach objectives. In language learning, SC impacts students' willingness to engage with tasks, such as writing^[23], speaking in front of peers, attempting advanced writing assignments, or tackling unfamiliar vocabulary in reading^[24]. Research shows that students with high SC are inclined to view difficulties as manageable challenges, whereas those with low SC tend to avoid participation and perceive challenges as impossible^[25-27].

TSRs significantly contribute to building students' SC in EFL classrooms. Teachers who provide constructive feedback, demonstrate empathy, and maintain a patient and encouraging demeanor can help students overcome emotional and psychological barriers such as anxiety and fear of failure^[28,29]. For instance, empathetic teachers who celebrate incremental successes and model positive attitudes toward learning mistakes can instill a sense of resilience in their students, enabling them to approach language learning tasks with greater confidence^[30,31]. In Saudi EFL classrooms, where cultural norms may inhibit students from asking questions or seeking clarification, TSRs are especially critical in fostering an environment of trust and openness.

While previous research has widely examined the role of TSRs in primary and secondary education, a notable gap exists in understanding their impact at the undergraduate level, particularly in EFL contexts^[32,33]. This gap is especially noticeable in Saudi Arabia, where first-year university students often enter English-intensive programs with varying levels of proficiency and confidence. Addressing this gap, this study investigates the role of TSRs in fostering SC and enhancing students' WECTE. It specifically examines how SC mediates the relation between TSRs and students' task engagement.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Teacher-Student Relationships

TSRs are widely recognized as a foundational element of effective teaching and learning processes^[8]. Positive TSRs, characterized by trust, respect, and mutual support, create environments that encourage students to engage actively with challenging tasks^[9]. This dynamic is critical in EFL classrooms, where learners often face heightened anxiety and fear of making mistakes^[19,20,34]. Supportive TSRs empower learners to overcome these challenges and build the confidence needed to tackle complex language tasks^[29,35].

Research consistently highlights the significant influence of TSRs on students' academic outcomes across educational levels. While TSRs in primary and secondary education have been extensively studied^[8,36], their role in higher education, especially in EFL contexts, has received less attention^[32,33,37]. In higher education, students are expected to assume more responsibility for their learning, yet supportive TSRs remain crucial for fostering motivation and resilience^[38–40].

TSRs are particularly significant in reducing anxiety—a pervasive barrier to language learning^[18,41,42]. Anxiety often manifests as reluctance to speak, difficulty in writing, or fear of critical reading tasks^[19,20]. Teachers who demonstrate empathy, provide constructive feedback, and cultivate a learning environment encourage students to participate, make mistakes, and learn from them^[43–45]. Beyond alleviating anxiety, TSRs enhance students' academic self-concept, resilience, and willingness to persevere through challenges^[28,46]. Approachable and supportive teachers, acting as positive role models, create enjoyable and productive learning environments that motivate students^[47], while the absence of such methods leads to less engaging and monotonous classroom experiences^[48].

While extensive research has explored the general effects of TSRs in academic settings, there is a noticeable gap in studies focusing on their specific impact within EFL contexts, particularly at the undergraduate level in Saudi Arabia. First-year university students often encounter unique challenges, including the dual pressures of adapting to a new academic environment and mastering English, which serves as the medium of instruction. These demands can heighten students' anxiety, affecting their willingness to engage with

demanding language tasks such as speaking, writing, and critical reading. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the role of TSRs in fostering motivation and encouraging students to approach challenging English language tasks with confidence. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *Positive TSRs are closely linked to enhanced WECTE among students.*

2.2. TSRs and Self-Confidence

SC, rooted in Bandura's concept of self-efficacy^[22], reflects learners' confidence in their skills and belief in their capacity to complete tasks. It is a critical element of academic achievement^[49]. Self-efficacy influences learning motivation, goal setting, and the use of self-regulated strategies^[25,50]. Individuals with high self-efficacy persist through difficulties, address challenges effectively, and achieve higher task completion rates^[51,52].

In EFL learning, SC reflects students' confidence in their skills to complete tasks, such as speaking, writing, and listening. This belief determines their willingness to engage in challenging or unfamiliar activities^[23,49]. High levels of SC enable learners to take risks, embrace mistakes, and persevere through difficulties, traits essential for achieving language proficiency^[53]. Conversely, low SC can cause avoidance in class discussions and reduced progress in language acquisition^[24,54].

TSRs are essential for building SC, particularly in EFL contexts where linguistic and cultural barriers can heighten students' fears of failure^[29,45]. Teachers who provide constructive feedback and celebrate incremental successes foster a positive atmosphere, encouraging learners to view challenges as opportunities for growth^[30,31,33]. Teachers who offer tailored improvement strategies during speaking tasks or written assignments help students build resilience and confidence^[43]. TSRs benefit students by fostering trust, reducing anxiety, and encouraging persistence in tackling demanding English language tasks. Thus, this study argues that strong TSRs foster SC, equipping students to engage in challenging English language tasks. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. *TSRs are positively linked to students' SC in English language learning.*

2.3. Students' SC and WECTE

Self-confidence is crucial in determining students' willingness to engage in challenging tasks^[55]. In language learning contexts, it drives students to approach complex activities—such as public speaking or essay writing—with persistence and a growth-oriented mindset^[53]. Conversely, low confidence often results in avoidance behaviors and an inability to confront perceived obstacles^[24,54].

Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism emphasizes the reinforcing relationship between positive learning experiences and SC, which encourages students to tackle progressively complex tasks. Confident learners are more likely to participate in class discussions actively, attempt advanced writing assignments, and persevere in mastering English proficiency^[56–59].

Teachers significantly influence SC by creating supportive environments and offering constructive feedback. In Saudi EFL classrooms, fostering SC is particularly important for overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers. Thus, this study assumes that it sets the foundation for students to feel more confident and willing to engage in challenging tasks, ultimately contributing to their language proficiency. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. *Students' SC is positively linked to their WECTE.*

2.4. Mediating Role of Students' SC Between TSR and WECTE

Self-confidence serves as a critical mediator between TSRs and students' willingness to engage in challenging academic tasks. Supportive TSRs, characterized by trust, encouragement, and empathy, alleviate emotional barriers such as fear of failure and anxiety, indirectly boosting students' SC^[20,28]. In face-to-face classrooms, strategies such as consistent encouragement, constructive feedback, peer collaboration, and creating a non-threatening space for error can foster emotional safety. In online settings, where physical presence is limited, emotional support can be maintained through personalized messages, video check-ins, active teacher presence, and anonymous participation tools. This supportive dynamic helps students view teacher feedback as constructive rather than critical, encouraging them to engage more actively with complex tasks^[60,61].

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) highlights

the significance of mastery experiences in building SC^[49]. Success in completing tasks with teacher support reinforces students' belief in their abilities, motivating them to attempt increasingly complex challenges. This process is particularly relevant in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia, where students often face linguistic and cultural barriers. TSRs in these contexts play a dual role: directly fostering confidence and indirectly enhancing task engagement^[43,62,63].

Moreover, frameworks like SDT^[5] and Attachment Theory^[64] emphasize the importance of TSRs in fulfilling learners' psychological needs. Supportive TSRs enhance students' intrinsic motivation and resilience, creating a welcoming environment where they can take academic risks and embrace challenges. In Saudi EFL settings, this study argues that this dynamic is vital for helping students overcome hesitation and persist through engaging in challenging English language tasks, ultimately achieving language proficiency. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

H4. *Students' SC mediates the relationship between TSRs and their WECTE.*

2.5. The Study and the Proposed Model

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of TSRs in influencing academic outcomes^[4,9], limited research has explored the specific mechanisms through which TSRs impact students' WECTE, particularly in EFL contexts. This gap is particularly relevant in Saudi Arabia, where first-year undergraduate students face the dual challenges of adapting to academic life and mastering English as the medium of instruction.

Drawing on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, the present study investigates both the direct and indirect roles of TSRs in shaping students' WECTE. TSRs are hypothesized to directly influence students' task engagement by providing a supportive and encouraging classroom environment. Simultaneously, TSRs are proposed to indirectly enhance WECTE by fostering students' self-confidence, a critical mediating factor. By improving self-efficacy through constructive feedback and emotional support, TSRs tend to be helpful for students overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, enabling them to persist in tasks such as speaking, writing, and critical reading in EFL contexts. To address these dynamics, a conceptual model is proposed to examine both the direct effects

of TSRs on WECTE and the mediating role of SC. **Figure 1** illustrates the study's conceptual framework.

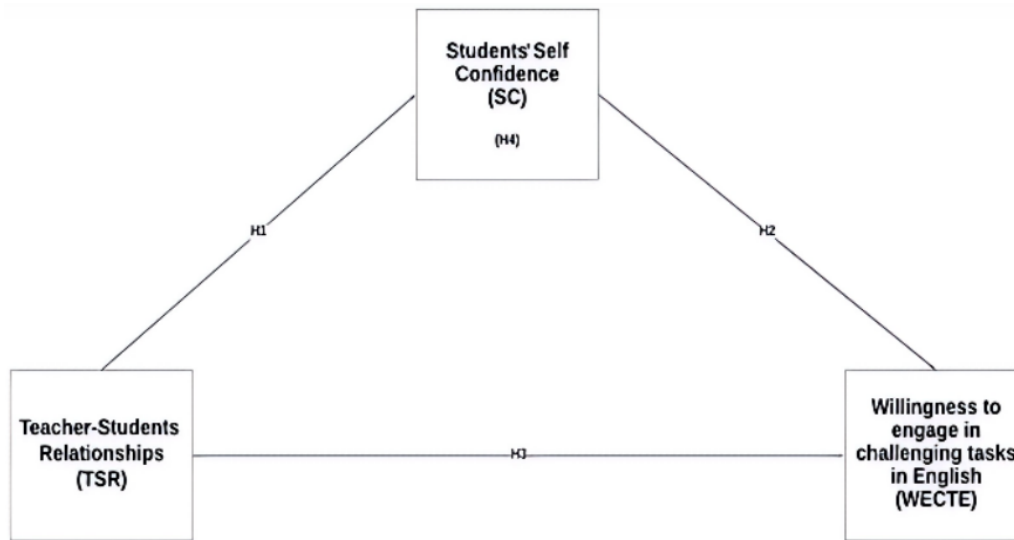


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Source: author development.

2.6. The Study Concepts and Definitions

Table 1 presents the concepts of the study.

Table 1. The operational definitions.

Concept	Operational Definitions
TSRs	TSRs refer to mutual respect, trust, and support between teachers and students, creating a positive classroom environment.
SC	SC is the learner's belief in their ability to perform and overcome challenges in English language tasks, fostering persistence and resilience.
WECTE	WECTE reflects students' readiness and determination to participate in difficult English language activities, driven by their academic goals and the desire to improve language skills.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Sample

This study examines the relationships among TSRs, students' SC, and their WECTE within the context of EFL learning. Deductive and quantitative approaches were utilized. A sample of 566 first-year undergraduate students was drawn from five universities across Saudi Arabia: King Faisal University, Northern Border University, Tabuk University, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, and Albaha University. These participants were enrolled in elementary

and pre-intermediate-level English courses, represented genders, and linguistic backgrounds. The selected students were considered representative of the larger population of first-year English language learners in Saudi Arabia, making the sample appropriate for the study's objectives.

The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method deemed suitable for this study due to its practical advantages^[65,66]. Convenience sampling facilitated access to students who were readily available during classroom sessions. This method was selected to address the challenges of limited time and logistical constraints and allowed for efficient data collection across multiple institutions.

Data was collected during the final four weeks of the 2024-2025 academic year, capturing student experiences at a time of heightened academic activity. Surveys were administered via Google Forms in classroom settings to maintain consistency and minimize external influences, ensuring reliable and context-specific responses. Before implementation, the questionnaire was reviewed and validated by academic experts in the field of EFL to ensure clarity, cultural relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. To accommodate the participants' diverse English proficiency levels, the questionnaires were translated into Arabic to guarantee a clear understanding of the survey items^[67]. A pilot study with 40 participants was carried out to evaluate the reliability and

validity of the translated version. Feedback from the pilot study led to minor adjustments, enhancing the quality and comprehensibility of the instruments.

The collected data were processed, verified for accuracy, and analyzed using PLS-SEM. This analytical approach was selected for its ability to handle complex relationships among variables and test both direct and indirect effects, aligning with the study's conceptual framework^[68]. This methodological approach ensures a broad understanding of the interplay between TSRs, SC, and WECTE in Saudi EFL contexts.

3.2. Instrument of the Study

This study utilized validated measures from authentic sources. The research model includes three primary constructs: TSRs, SC, and WECTE. First, TSRs were measured using items adapted from the TSR Questionnaire^[69]. This scale is commonly utilized to evaluate the quality of teacher-student interaction in various educational contexts^[33]. The scale evaluated TSRs across dimensions such as teacher support, respect and trust, and responsiveness to student needs. Example items included statements like “The English teacher creates a supportive environment where I feel comfortable asking questions, even about difficult topics,” and “My teacher recognizes and appreciates my efforts, even when I struggle with challenging tasks.” Second, SC was evaluated using a scale based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory. This scale measured students' SC in their willingness to engage in challenging English language tasks, including speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Sample items included “I am confident in participating in discussions or presentations in English, even when the topics are challenging,” and “I am confident in improving my English skills when my teacher provides constructive feedback.” Third, the WECTE scale was developed to assess students' motivation and determination to undertake demanding English language tasks. This measure captures the intensity of students' intentions and efforts to overcome challenges in their language learning journey. This construct aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of willingness and effort in language task completion^[70,71]. Example items include “I am ready to do whatever it takes to succeed in challenging English tasks” and “I have seriously thought about how to overcome difficulties in challenging English tasks.”

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The study gathered data from 566 first-year undergraduate students across five universities in Saudi Arabia. The participants comprised 45% male and 55% female students. In terms of age, most respondents (85%) were between 18 and 21 years old, with the remaining 15% aged 22 to 25. The sample reflects a diverse demographic distribution, providing a representative mix of gender and age groups suitable for examining the dynamics of TSRs, SC, and WECTE among Saudi EFL learners.

4.2. Data Analysis Approach

PLS-SEM was employed in this study to analyze the data and validate the proposed hypotheses. This method was selected for its effectiveness in examining complex interactions among latent variables and its capability to manage small sample sizes^[68]. It is particularly suited for exploratory research in the social sciences, where theoretical development is ongoing, and model complexity is high. The data analysis was performed in two key stages to ensure the findings were both robust and reliable: assessing the measurement model and the structural model. Each stage included various statistical tests to verify construct validity and evaluate the strength and significance of the hypothesized relationships. While PLS-SEM enhances the study's validity by modeling complex relationships and accounting for measurement error, it has limitations in fully capturing the nuanced, context-specific nature of psychological and relational constructs. To address this, future research is encouraged to use qualitative methods alongside PLS-SEM for a more comprehensive understanding of EFL learner experiences.

While PLS-SEM enhances the validity by allowing for simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships and accommodating measurement errors, it also presents limitations. Specifically, it may not fully capture the depth of psychological and relational constructs, which are often context-sensitive and emotionally nuanced. As such, the study acknowledges the potential value of integrating qualitative data in future research to complement the statistical modeling and provide richer insights into learner experiences.

and perceptions in EFL contexts.

4.2.1. Measurement Model Analysis

The first step of the analysis involved evaluating the reliability and validity to assess the study's constructs: TSRs, SC, and WECTE. Internal consistency and reliability were examined using Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). Both CA and CR values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the items within each construct were sufficiently related and captured the same underlying concept. Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all constructs exceeding the acceptable AVE threshold of 0.50, confirming that the items explained a substantial portion of the variance in their respective constructs. These findings, summarized in **Table 2**, demonstrate that the constructs used in the study met the required reliability and validity standards, ensuring their appropriateness for the subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity.

	CA	CR	AVE
WECTE	0.951	0.952	0.772
SC	0.957	0.958	0.771
TSRs	0.924	0.925	0.768

The reliability of the construct indicators was then assessed to evaluate each item's contribution to its respective construct. The indicator loading threshold was set at 70%, as is standard in exploratory research^[68,72]. In this study, the loadings of all indicators met the threshold without the need to remove any items. **Table 3** shows that all items contributed meaningfully to their respective constructs.

Table 3. Construct item reliability.

Construct	SC	TSRs	WECTE VIF
SC1	0.861		3.121
SC2	0.883		3.496
SC3	0.876		3.298
SC4	0.895		3.909
SC5	0.867		3.388
SC6	0.894		3.779
SC7	0.876		3.397
TSRs1		0.854	3.149
TSRs2		0.901	4.253
TSRs3		0.871	3.317
TSRs4		0.873	3.533
TSRs5		0.869	3.359
TSRs6		0.881	3.626
TSRs7		0.883	3.683
TSRs8		0.890	3.937

Table 3. Cont.

Construct	SC	TSRs	WECTE VIF
WECTE1			0.860
WECTE2			0.870
WECTE3			0.896
WECTE4			0.885
WECTE5			0.870

Source: Compiled by author.

Next, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity in PLS-SEM. Discriminant validity measures the distinctness among constructs in a model. Ensuring discriminant validity confirms that a construct captures phenomena unique to itself and does not overlap excessively with other constructs. **Table 4** presents the results, confirming discriminant validity. These findings confirm that the constructs exhibit good discriminant validity, ensuring that they are conceptually distinct and appropriately measured in the study.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	SC	TSRs	WECTE
SC	0.879		
TSRs	0.853	0.878	
WECTE	0.780	0.728	0.876

Source: Compiled by author.

4.2.2. Structural Model Analysis

We evaluated the structural model of the study by testing the path coefficients using the bootstrapping method. The bootstrapping results, presented in **Table 5**, revealed that the proposed hypotheses (H1–H4) were tested and accepted. H1, which posited a positive relation between TSRs and WECTE, was supported. H2, which hypothesized a positive relation between TSRs and SC, was supported. H3, positing a positive relation between SC and WECTE, was also supported. Moreover, H4, which proposed that SC mediates the relation between TSRs and WECTE, was supported, indicating that TSRs influence WECTE indirectly through SC. These results suggest that while TSRs do not directly encourage students to engage in challenging English tasks, they play an essential role in building students' SC, which, in turn, motivates students to tackle such tasks. Further elaboration of these findings is provided in the discussion section.

Upon completing the hypotheses testing, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (F^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) were analyzed to assess the model's explanatory power, the impact of the exogenous variables, and its

predictive accuracy. The R^2 results for this study, as shown in **Table 6**, revealed that TSRs explain 72.7% of the variance in SC, indicating substantial predictive power. Additionally, SC accounts for 62.2% of the variance in WECTE, which also reflects substantial predictive power. These findings underscore the robust explanatory capabilities of the

proposed model, suggesting that TSRs significantly influence SC, which in turn strongly predicts WECTE. These results highlight the interconnectedness of the constructs and provide an understanding of their relationships, explored through the structural model analysis. **Figure 2** is a representation of the structural model.

Table 5. Path coefficients.

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T Values	p Values	Decision
H1	TSRs $\rightarrow$ WECTE	0.227	3.101	0.002	Accepted
H2	TSRs $\rightarrow$ SC	0.853	45.840	0.000	Accepted
H3	SC $\rightarrow$ WECTE	0.587	9.276	0.000	Accepted
H4	TSRs $\rightarrow$ SC $\rightarrow$ WECTE	0.501	9.007	0.000	Accepted

Source: Primary data.

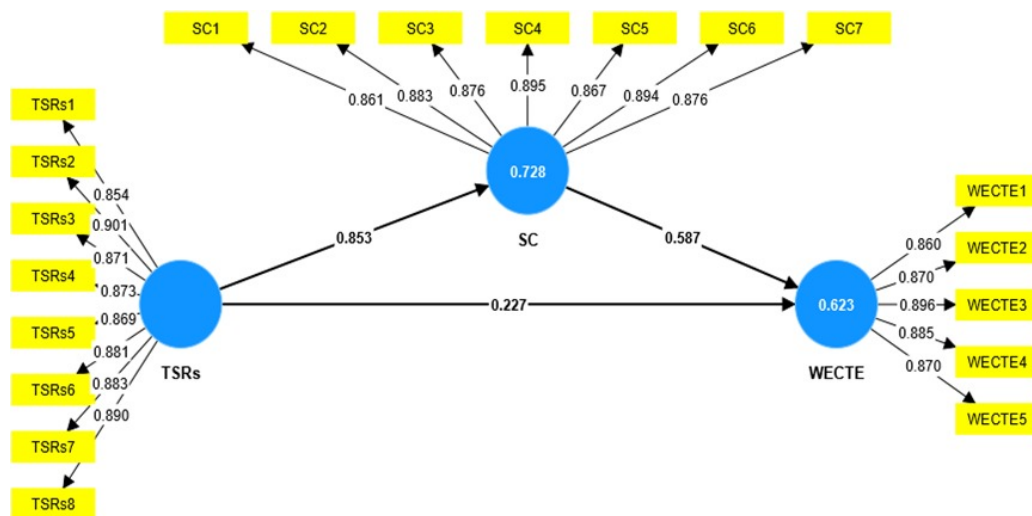


Figure 2. The structural model.

Table 6. Coefficient of determination (R^2).

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
SC	0.728	0.727
WECTE	0.623	0.622

Source: Primary data.

Table 7 presents the effect sizes (F^2) for the relationships among the study constructs, assessed according to Cohen's guidelines^[73]. The findings reveal that TSRs have a substantial effect on SC ($F^2 = 2.676$), indicating the critical role of TSRs in enhancing students' SC. Additionally, SC has

a moderate effect on WECTE ($F^2 = 0.249$), highlighting its significance in motivating students to engage in challenging tasks in English. Finally, TSRs have a negligible effect on WECTE ($F^2 = 0.030$), suggesting a limited direct impact of TSRs on students' WECTE.

Table 7. Effect size (F^2).

	F-Square
SC $\rightarrow$ WECTE	0.249
TSRs $\rightarrow$ SC	2.676
TSRs $\rightarrow$ WECTE	0.037

The correlation matrix in **Table 8** reveals that TSRs and SC have a strong positive correlation (0.848), indicating a significant relationship between TSRs and SC. Similarly,

TSRs and WECTE show a moderately strong positive correlation (0.775), while SC and WECTE exhibit a positive correlation of 0.726.

Table 8. Correlation matrix.

	SC	TSRs	WECTE
SC	1.000	0.848	0.726
TSRs	0.848	1.000	0.775
WECTE	0.726	0.775	1.000

Source: Primary data.

5. Discussion

The hypotheses were tested to evaluate the relationships among TSRs, SC, and WECTE. H1 proposed a direct positive relationship between TSRs and WECTE. The analysis revealed a β of 0.227, with a t-value of 3.101 and a p -value of < 0.05 , showing statistical significance. These results confirm that positive TSRs contribute to an increased WECTE. Therefore, H1 is accepted. This result is consistent with the findings of^[4,8,33]. However, the direct effect observed in our study was less pronounced than the indirect effect mediated by SC. This finding highlights the possibility that TSRs may primarily influence WECTE through their impact on intermediary constructs such as self-confidence, rather than exerting a strong direct influence. Several contextual and cultural factors may explain the relatively weaker direct effect. In Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms, cultural norms and traditional educational practices may limit students' direct reliance on teacher-student relationships to tackle challenging English tasks. Instead, TSRs might serve as foundational support, enhancing students' confidence and willingness to engage indirectly. This aligns with the broader literature suggesting that TSRs are critical in mitigating anxiety^[18,41,42], fostering resilience^[28,46], and creating a supportive learning environment conducive to engagement^[35,44,45,47,48].

Hypothesis H2 suggested a positive relationship between TSRs and SC. The findings show a high β of 0.853, with a t-value of 45.840 and a p -value of < 0.05 . This result demonstrates that TSRs significantly enhance students' self-confidence. Consequently, H2 is supported. These results align closely with Bandura's self-efficacy framework. The substantial β value underlines the pivotal role of TSRs in shaping students' beliefs in their abilities, particularly in the context of EFL learning. This finding resonates with previous research that emphasizes the critical function of TSRs in

building SC among learners^[45], building resilience and confidence^[33], fostering a positive atmosphere, and encouraging learners to view challenges as opportunities for growth^[30].

Hypothesis H3 proposed a positive impact of SC on WECTE. The analysis yielded a β of 0.587, with a t-value of 9.276 and a p -value of < 0.05 . This relationship is strong. It confirms that increased SC motivates students to engage in challenging English tasks. Thus, H3 is accepted. These results are consistent with Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism. This highlights the reinforcing relationship between positive learning experiences and SC, which encourages students to tackle challenging tasks gradually. This finding is also in line with studies such as^[56-59], which concluded that confident learners are more likely to embrace these challenges, actively participate in class discussions, and persevere in the face of setbacks to achieve English proficiency. Conversely, students with low SC may avoid such tasks, resulting in limited language exposure and slow progress^[6,74]. Cultural and language barriers in Saudi EFL classrooms make students reluctant to participate due to fear of being judged or making mistakes. Teachers can help by building students' confidence with support and constructive feedback, using culturally relevant topics. These strategies build confidence and help students navigate complex language activities^[62,63].

Hypothesis H4 posited a mediating effect of SC between TSRs and WECTE. The results show a significant indirect β of 0.501, with a t-value of 9.007 and a p -value of < 0.05 . This suggests that SC mediates the relationship between TSRs and WECTE, strengthening the association between these constructs. Accordingly, H4 is supported. These results suggest that while TSRs directly influence WECTE, their effect is significantly amplified by enhancing self-confidence. This mediating relationship is consistent with Bandura's SCT, which highlights the need for mastery

experiences in developing self-confidence. Positive TSRs contribute to such experiences by fostering an environment that motivates students to engage in academic tasks. This aligns with the SDT^[5], which emphasizes the fulfillment of psychological needs as essential for intrinsic motivation. TSRs satisfy these needs by providing students with the emotional security and encouragement required to embrace academic challenges. Similarly, Attachment Theory, as proposed by Bowlby^[64], highlights the role of secure relationships in fostering resilience and persistence, critical traits for language learning in EFL settings.

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical Implications

The study extends the existing literature by demonstrating the pivotal role of SC as a mediator between TSRs and students' WECTE. These findings highlight how TSRs can fulfill learners' psychological needs, thereby fostering motivation and persistence. Additionally, the study contributes to the relatively underexplored area of TSRs in higher education, particularly in non-Western EFL contexts, emphasizing the interplay between socio-emotional support and language learning outcomes. However, it is important to note that individual learner differences, such as personality traits, learning preferences, and prior academic experiences may influence the mediation process. Learners with high openness or extroversion may respond more strongly to supportive TSRs. At the same time, those with negative academic histories or introverted tendencies might require different types of or longer durations of support. These factors help explain the variation in the degree to which TSRs enhance learner engagement through self-confidence.

6.2. Practical Implications

Teachers play a crucial role in building SC and WECTE. The present study indicates that strong TSRs are vital. This involves providing constructive feedback, celebrating small victories, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. Personalized feedback and culturally sensitive teaching materials are critical in Saudi classrooms, where cultural norms might sometimes hinder active student participation. Furthermore, incorporating collaborative projects and real-world

learning experiences can significantly boost students' confidence in applying their language skills.

Educational institutions should prioritize the development of TSRs through targeted teacher training and professional development programs. Workshops focused on emotional intelligence, effective communication, and relationship-building can equip educators with the tools necessary to create emotionally supportive learning environments. Moreover, evaluation frameworks for teachers should go beyond academic performance metrics to include their ability to build positive and constructive relationships with students, recognizing this as a core component of effective teaching.

At a policy level, integrating TSR and SC measures into national education strategies can have far-reaching benefits. Policymakers should consider funding teacher training initiatives, creating platforms for teacher-student collaboration, and promoting curricula that prioritize relationship-building and emotional well-being. Such measures would align with broader educational reforms aimed at improving English language proficiency and fostering student resilience.

In the Saudi EFL context, where linguistic and cultural barriers often hinder active engagement, this study highlights the critical need for strong TSRs to mitigate anxiety and build confidence. Teachers who understand and address these barriers can create safe and encouraging environments where students feel empowered to take academic risks. Educational institutions should facilitate these initiatives by offering resources designed to address the cultural and linguistic needs of Saudi learners, ensuring classroom practices are aligned with their specific challenges and goals.

Although the study is based on data from Saudi universities, the findings may hold broader relevance for other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where educational systems often share similar socio-cultural, linguistic, and institutional dynamics. In particular, the value placed on teacher authority, the challenges of second-language acquisition, and the psychological barriers to active classroom participation are common across many MENA EFL contexts. Many educational systems in the MENA context exhibit similar teacher-student dynamics, where hierarchical classroom structures, limited student participation, and anxiety around language performance are prevalent. Given these shared socio-educational character-

istics, the study's implications for fostering self-confidence and engagement through supportive TSRs may be applicable across comparable EFL settings in the region.

In short, this study underscores the multifaceted impact of TSRs on SC and WECTE, offering actionable recommendations for educators, institutions, and policymakers. By prioritizing socio-emotional support in EFL education, stakeholders can enhance student engagement, resilience, and language proficiency, contributing to long-term academic and societal benefits.

Accordingly, greater attention should be given to selecting and developing educators who demonstrate strong relational skills, cultural awareness, and the ability to create inclusive and motivating classroom environments. Teachers who can connect with learners through shared experiences and interests are often better positioned to promote confidence and engagement—sometimes more so than those selected purely based on their linguistic background. This perspective invites a more holistic view of teacher effectiveness, one that values empathy, cultural alignment, and pedagogical adaptability as central to student success in EFL contexts.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the intricate relationships between TSRs, SC, and students' WECTE within the Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms. The significant mediating role of self-confidence underscores its critical importance in transforming supportive TSRs into tangible academic engagement and success. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of TSRs and SC by integrating insights from Bandura's SCT and Deci and Ryan's SDT, offering a nuanced perspective on how psychological constructs interact to influence language learning outcomes.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable guidance for educators and institutions. Teachers are encouraged to cultivate positive TSRs by demonstrating empathy, providing constructive feedback, and celebrating incremental successes. Such practices can create an environment that fosters self-confidence, enabling students to confront and persevere through challenging tasks. Educational pol-

icymakers and teacher training programs should prioritize strategies that enhance TSRs and equip educators with the skills to support students' emotional and psychological needs effectively. This approach is particularly crucial in the Saudi EFL contexts, where linguistic and cultural barriers often impede learning.

The study's implications extend beyond Saudi Arabia, offering insights for EFL education in diverse cultural settings. By addressing the interplay between TSRs, SC, and WECTE, this research contributes to global discussions on effective language teaching methodologies and learner engagement strategies. Moreover, it highlights the crucial role of TSRs and SC in promoting academic engagement and resilience in EFL classrooms. By bridging theoretical concepts with practical strategies, it offers a comprehensive framework for enhancing language learning outcomes, empowering educators, and inspiring learners to achieve their full potential.

While this study offers valuable quantitative insights into the relationships among TSRs, SC, and WECTE, future research would benefit from incorporating qualitative approaches to capture the complex emotional and relational dynamics underlying these constructs. Methods such as interviews, focus groups, or classroom observations could provide richer, context-specific perspectives on how students and teachers perceive and experience TSRs in real-life EFL settings. Such approaches can reveal nuances that are often missed in purely quantitative designs. Furthermore, to enhance the generalizability of the findings, future studies should consider more diverse sampling strategies and include a wider range of cultural and linguistic contexts beyond Saudi universities. This would enable a more comprehensive understanding of how TSRs function across various EFL learning environments.

In conclusion, this research highlights the significance of relational and psychological dimensions in language learning, underscoring that effective EFL education extends beyond linguistic instruction to encompass the emotional and interpersonal aspects of the classroom. By foregrounding the interplay between TSRs, SC, and WECTE, the study provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing student engagement, with potential implications for global EFL practices.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Data can be given upon a reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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