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The Interplay of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy in Predicting Emotion Regulation: Insights from EFL Learners

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Abstract

Addressing an underexplored dimension of the socio-emotional aspects of second language acquisition, this study examines how emotional intelligence (EI) and self-efficacy (SE) differentially predict emotion regulation (ER) among 256 Iranian EFL learners aged 10 to 15. Employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the research investigates the interrelationships among these psychological constructs within the context of English language learning. The findings indicate a moderate yet statistically significant positive association between SE and ER, and a stronger positive relationship between EI and ER, while no significant correlation emerges between SE and EI. The proposed SEM model exhibits an excellent fit, confirming that EI serves as a more powerful predictor of ER than SE. These resultsunderscore the crucial role of emotional intelligence in facilitating learners' management of affective experiences during language learning. Consequently, the study recommends incorporating EI-oriented training within EFL instructional programs to foster learners' emotional regulation, resilience, and academic success, thereby reinforcing the complementary relationship between emotional competence and linguistic-cognitive development.

Keywords: academic performance, emotional competence, psychological factors, SEM

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Introduction

Salovey and Mayer's (1990) seminal model conceptualizes Emotional Intelligence as a multifaceted skill involving the discernment of one's own and others' feelings, the management of these emotions, and their application to enhance cognitive processes. Since the late 1970s, several studies have revealed that the current educational system concentrates on rational and cognitive aspects including problem-solving and memory; therefore, scant attention is paid to emotional aspect, and its crucial role is ignored. (Nelson & Low,1999). Goleman (1995) postulated that EIis the ability to identify and regulate individuals' emotions. EI can be regarded as an influential factor for predicting success in our lives. According to Goleman (1995), EI is a more reliable indicator than intelligence quotient (IQ) in determining who is likely to exceed in a given profession or role, such as becoming a top-performing salesperson, team leader, or high-ranking executive. EI functions as social intelligence and a predictor of overall performance in certain contexts, such as job performance (Salovey and Mayer, 1990)

In parallel, the concept of self-efficacy (SE), first proposed by Bandura (1977), has become a fundamental construct in the study of human behavior. Bandura (1977) defined SE as an individuals' confidence in their ability to plan and perform the actions necessary to achieve specific goals. SE affects the ways individuals tackle difficulties, establish objectives, and maintain effort when confronted with obstacles (Bandura et al., 1999). Bandura (1977) highlighted SE as a core component of human agency, asserting that individuals need to believe in their capacity to bring about change within their chosen domains in order to succeed. SE beliefs are particularly influential in shaping motivation, confidence, and stress management, especially in challenging or high-pressure situations (Bong & Clark, 1999; Bandura, 2012).

Emotions are crucial for language learning process, significantly influencing both learners' experiences and their overall achievement. According to Pekrun et al. (2022), the learning process is linked closely with a variety of emotions both positive and negative that can profoundly influence academic performance. For instance, Derakhshan (2022) emphasized that language learners often face emotional difficulties, including feelings of anxiety and frustration, alongside positive emotions like curiosity and enjoyment. Effectively managing these emotions—referred to as Emotion Regulation (ER)—is essential for successful language acquisition (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Teng & Zhang, 2021). Thompson (1994) defines ER as the extrinsic and intrinsic processes by which individuals monitor, assess, and adjust their emotional responses in order to attain particular goals.

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), people who are skilled in emotional regulation can more effectively use strategies that diminish their negative feelings and enhance their positive ones. Moreover, ER is recognized as a key regulatory mechanism that buffers against the adverse effects of stress and promotes psychological resilience (Myruski et al., 2018).

Although numerous studies have explored the associations among emotional intelligence (EI), self-efficacy (SE), and emotion regulation (ER), there

remains a significant gap concerning how these variables interact among adolescent EFL learners with lower-intermediate proficiency. To address this gap, the present investigation examines the interrelations among these three constructs and explores the extent to which SE and EI can predict learners' ability to regulate their emotions. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant relationships among Iranian EFL students' ER and EI, SE?
2. Is EFL students' SE a significant predictor of students' ER?
3. Is EFL students' EI a significant predictor of students' ER?

Review of Literature

Theoretical Background

The present research is anchored in established theoretical perspectives on emotional intelligence (EI), self-efficacy (SE), and emotion regulation (ER), all of which offer an integrative foundation for examining the psychological mechanisms underlying language learning. Emotional intelligence, as defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), refers to the capacity to recognize, comprehend, and manage one's own and others' emotions. Goleman (1995) later expanded this notion, emphasizing EI as a vital determinant of success that extends beyond conventional measures of intelligence. Complementing this, Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory underscores the centrality of self-efficacy—individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform tasks effectively—as a driving force for motivation and persistence in educational settings. Gross (1998) adds to this framework by conceptualizing emotion regulation as the processes through which individuals modulate emotional responses to meet personal or situational goals. Integrating these perspectives allows this study to capture the interdependent nature of EI, SE, and ER, thereby illuminating their combined influence on EFL learners' affective and academic functioning.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI), a construct rooted in Salovey and Mayer's (1990) definition concerning the recognition and management of emotions in self and others, now occupies a central position in contemporary educational inquiry. Numerous studies have established its significant impact on both academic outcomes and social functioning (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). Goleman's (1995) influential framework expanded this conceptualization by delineating five core dimensions: emotional self-awareness, impulse control, intrinsic motivation, empathetic understanding, and interpersonal effectiveness. His theoretical proposition that EI might surpass conventional cognitive measures (e.g., IQ) in predicting success across various professional domains - including leadership effectiveness, collaborative performance, and career advancement - has stimulated considerable scholarly discussion. However, subsequent empirical investigations, such as those by Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004), have revealed more nuanced

findings, indicating that EI's predictive validity may be context-dependent and vary across different demographic groups (e.g., Alavi et al., 2019).

Within the domain of second language acquisition, EI has been demonstrated to play a pivotal role in navigating the emotional challenges associated with learning a new language. For example, Pishghadam (2009) found that language learners possessing higher EI demonstrated greater capacity in managing language anxiety and frustration, leading to improved academic performance. Similarly, Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli (2012) demonstrated that EI positively correlates with advanced cognitive processesin EFL learners. These findings indicate that EI contributes to improved emotional well-being and promotes cognitive development and academic achievement within language learning contexts.

Self-Efficacy

The emotional response patterns of individuals are influenced by SE and emotional response patterns represents individuals' EI; therefore, SE is closely linked to EI (Mills, 2014). He defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute specific tasks successfully, proposing it as a reliable predictor of subsequent performance. Bandura (1993) pointed out that a strong sense of SE accelerates an individual's success in various ways. He noted thatself-efficacious individuals considered hard tasks as challenges that must be tackled. Based on this efficient method, individuals are interested in activities, create challenging aims, and succeed. Studies indicated that learners' SE is a dominant predictor in their educational performance (Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1995). Based on Bandura and Schunk (1981), learners with high academic SE more probably to take on perplexing duties. On the other hand, the learners with low academic SE are less likely to deal with challenges. (Schunk, 1990).

Within the context of English language acquisition, Wang et al. (2014) conceptualized self-efficacy (SE) as learners' confidence in their capacity to successfully complete language-related tasks based on accumulated learning experiences. Extensive research has established the crucial relationship between SE and academic performance (Rafiola et al., 2020; Sirakaya et al., 2018), with multiple studies demonstrating that students with stronger self-belief tend to achieve better learning outcomes (Montgomery & Mirenda, 2014; Versland& Erickson, 2017).Although the link between self-efficacy and success is well-established, scholarly inquiry has afforded scant attention to the interaction of SE with affective elements, notably strategies for regulating emotions, within the realm of English as a Foreign Language learning.

Emotion Regulation

Numerous longitudinal investigations have been conducted on definitions of ER. ER comprises a varied range of behavioral, physiological, and cognitive processes through which individuals manage their emotional responses (Gross & John, 2003). Cole et al. (1994) hypothesized ER as the ability to navigate ongoing experiences with an appropriate range of emotional responses which are socially acceptable and adaptable—allowing for both spontaneous emotional expression and the capacity to inhibit such responses when necessary. Teng and Zhang (2017)

postulated that a wide range of strategies are applied by learners to adjust their pleasant feelings, which can lead to improved academic performance. Learners apply several techniques in order to reduce their unpleasant emotions. (Fan & Wang, 2022; Greenier et al., 2021). Based on Fathi et al. (2021), learners experience adverse effects of negative feelings on their academic achievement. Therefore, learners can benefit from ER strategies which can enhance their effectiveness in the learning environment (Wang et al., 2021).ER involves various strategies employed to initiate, inhibit, or modify an individual's emotional state or behavior in specific situations (Gross, 1998). Wang and Saudino (2011) stated that ER primarily involves adjusting internal emotional states in response to external demands.

Empirical Studies

Emotional Intelligence and Self-efficacy

A robust body of research within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context has established a significant correlation between learners' emotional intelligence (EI) and their self-efficacy (SE). Adeyemo's (2007) study established that EFL learners with higher emotional intelligence tend to exhibit greater self-assurance, personal adequacy, and stronger beliefs in their language learning capabilities. These findings were corroborated by Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2011), who found statistically significant relationships between EI components and EFL learners' SE beliefs. Their research particularly highlighted how emotional intelligence factors like stress tolerance and self-actualization capacity significantly correlate with learners' confidence in their language acquisition abilities. More recently, Rashid et al. (2021) further confirmed these relationships, demonstrating that various dimensions of emotional intelligence substantially contribute to the development of academic self-efficacy among language learners. Collectively, these studies suggest that emotionally intelligent learners tend to develop stronger confidence in their capacity to master a new language.

The accumulated research evidence suggests that self-efficacy (SE) influences emotional intelligence (EI) across both individual and social dimensions, while also serving as an accelerator for learning processes. Empirical investigations by Chan (2008) and Mikolajczak et al. (2007) have systematically shown that learners possessing elevated emotional intelligence typically demonstrate stronger self-efficacy beliefs and greater capacity to navigate academic challenges. The work of Rastegar and Memarpour (2009) in an Iranian EFL context provided empirical validation for this relationship, reporting a significant positive correlation between teachers' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as measured by standardized scales (Baleghizadeh & Jula, 2024; Namaziandost et al., 2024), thereby underscoring the dynamic interplay between affective and self-belief systems in education.

Sun and Lyu (2022) investigated the relationship between university students' emotional intelligence (EI) and self-efficacy (SE), exploring the mediating role of coping styles. The participant included 800 university students in China and they were asked to complete valid questionnaire and the result analyzed by SPSS 20.0. The data revealed that SE is influenced by EI through coping styles not only

directly but also indirectly. Furthermore, the results indicated that students understand more positive feelings when they measure their SE based on their emotional and mental state; therefore, they can gain higher SE in activities like occupation, education, and apprenticeships. Webb-Williams (2017) investigated science SE within primary classroom settings to identify its underlying sources. The participants of the present study were 182 children, 10 to 12 years old, and mixed-method research was conducted. The results revealed that although boys and girls achieved comparable academic performance in science, girls consistently undervalued their own capabilities. The results illustrated that gender have same academic level in science, but girls underestimate their own ability.

Emotional Intelligence and Emotion Regulation

While Rashid et al. (2021) established significant interrelationships among emotional intelligence, regulation, and expressivity in organizational contexts, a subsequent educational study by Gao and Yang (2023) delved into the predictive nature of these constructs. Surveying 391 EFL learners, they demonstrated that trait EI significantly predicts emotion regulation strategy use, with the intensity of negative emotions mediating the link to cognitive reappraisal but not to expressive suppression.

The existing literature consistently supports a robust connection between EI and ER strategies. Quintana-Orts et al. (2020) established positive correlations between these variables, while Śmieja-Nęcka and Kobylińska (2011) found that individuals with higher EI tend to employ more adaptive ER strategies. Peña-Sarrionandia et al. (2015) further elucidated this relationship through their examination of emotional processes, demonstrating that heightened EI not only influences emotional experience but also enhances regulatory capacity.

In language learning contexts, empirical evidence suggests EI's broader cognitive benefits. Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli (2012) revealed that learners with superior EI demonstrate enhanced cognitive functioning and reading abilities. Complementing these findings, Aki's (2006) research indicated that EI development can positively impact overall language acquisition outcomes.

Emotion Regulation and Self-Efficacy

The link between emotion regulation (ER) and self-efficacy (SE) is being increasingly substantiated across diverse educational populations. Initial evidence from Bazadough and Abu Sulaiman (2023) confirmed a significant correlation among university academic leaders. Building on this foundation, Doménech et al. (2024) advanced the inquiry by scrutinizing this interaction in a large adolescent cohort (N=703), introducing the moderating influence of personality traits, namely emotional stability and extraversion. Their structural equation modeling results revealed direct associations between ER and emotional SE, particularly in managing both positive and negative affective states.

In language education research, Fathi and Derakhshan (2019) focused on Iranian English instructors, utilizing standardized measures to assess how teacher SE and ER influence occupational stress. Their findings positioned SE as a stronger predictor of teaching stress compared to ER. Similarly, Chen and Lin (2009)

demonstrated the predictive value of SE in academic contexts, showing its significant correlation with writing performance among Taiwanese university students completing English proficiency assessments.

Method

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was employed to select participants who met predefined inclusion criteria aligned with the study's objectives. The final sample consisted of 256 Iranian EFL learners (136 females and 120 males) aged between 10 and 15 years, all of whom were native speakers of Persian. These participants were drawn from an initial pool of 290 students who completed the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) at Milad Language Institute in Maragheh, East Azerbaijan Province, Iran. Only learners whose OQPT scores ranged between 24 and 30—indicating lower-intermediate proficiency—were included to ensure linguistic homogeneity, an essential condition for investigating the relationships among EI, SE, and ER. Informed consent was obtained from all participants or their legal guardians prior to the study, and participation was voluntary.

Instruments

Given the fact that this study was a correlational research study in essence among young intermediate learners, one homogeneity test and three types of questionnaires were administered to collect data.

Oxford Quick Placement Test

The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) is a widely recognized standardized assessment aimed at efficiently and accurately measuring the English proficiency of non-native speakers. Developed by Oxford University Press, the test assesses reading, vocabulary, grammar, and listening abilities, providing a reliable measure of a learner's CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) level, ranging from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient). The first part of the test (40 questions) was administered to the students and those whose test score were between 24-30 (lower-intermediate) were selected.

Self-Efficacy Scale

This study utilized Sherer et al.'s (1982) Self-Efficacy Scale, a validated instrument measuring individuals' perceived self-efficacy across different domains. The 23-item scale features two distinct subscales: a 17-item General Self-Efficacy subscale evaluating overall confidence in handling diverse challenges, and a 6-item Social Self-Efficacy subscale assessing interpersonal competence. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Emotional Quotient Scale

Emotional intelligence was evaluated using Wong and Law's (2002) Emotional Quotient Scale, a 24-item instrument based on the four-branch EI model. The questionnaire measures four key dimensions: Self-Emotion Appraisal

(recognizing one's emotions), Regulation of Emotions (managing emotional responses), Use of Emotion (harnessing emotions productively), and Others-Emotion Appraisal (understanding others' emotions). Responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale identical to the self-efficacy measure.

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire

Participants' emotion regulation strategies were assessed through Gross and John's (2003) 10-item questionnaire. This instrument distinguishes between two fundamental regulation approaches: cognitive reappraisal (adaptively reframing emotional experiences) and expressive suppression (inhibiting emotional expression). While reappraisal is associated with positive psychological outcomes, suppression often correlates with adverse effects. The instrument employs a seven-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Procedure

The study was conducted in Winter 2024. To achieve the objectives of the study participants were required to complete Oxford English proficiency test, to ensure homogeneity in language proficiency levels across the sample. They also requested to completeSEscale questionnaire, emotional quotient scale questionnaire, along with ER questionnaire. Participants were informed of the study's objectives and were encouraged to respond to the questionnaires truthfully. They were informed how to fill out the questionnaires and explained that their identities were guaranteed anonymity, after that the consent form was delivered to them. The questionnaires were distributed only to those who were willing to take part in this study after that they signed the consent form. Participants were also asked to fill out the demographic part of the questionnaire, providing information regarding their age, gender, and other details.

Data Analysis Procedure

Analysis of the collected questionnaire data was conducted using the SmartPLS software package, applying the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. The analytical procedure commenced with generating descriptive statistics to characterize the data distribution and central tendencies of the primary variables. The analytical procedure followed a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model's psychometric properties were assessed using composite reliability (CR) for internal consistency, average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity, and standardized factor loadings. Following the establishment of a robust measurement model, the structural model was evaluated by analyzing the significance of path coefficients, the model's explanatory power (R^2), and its predictive relevance (Q^2) to test the hypothesized relationships. The choice of PLS-SEM was appropriate due to its effectiveness in modeling complex relationships among latent constructs and its robustness with relatively small or moderate sample sizes. Furthermore, a PLS-Predict procedure was employed to assess the model’s predictive performance in out-of-sample contexts, thereby confirming the generalizability and practical implications of the findings.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the mean, standard deviation, variance, minimum, and maximum values for each research variable, corresponding to each research question. These results are summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1

Variable Coding and Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

	E	SE	SE	I	EA	OE	OE	EA	R
N	49	49	49	51	51	51	51	50	51
Missing	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mean	.96	.93	.98	.54	.69	.36	.89	.21	.68
SD	539	533	739	91	.22	.04	.29	.24	.06
Variance	291	284	546	825	.497	.084	.655	.542	.114
Skewness	162	379	000	.675	.740	.348	1.04	.235	.300
Std. Error Skewness	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Kurtosis	144	229	085	.320	.535	.639	.127	.972	.038
Std. Error Kurtosis	307	307	307	306	306	306	306	307	306
Minimum	.24	.47	.00	.19	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Maximum	.44	.71	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

Note: SE = Self Efficacy; GSE = General Self-efficacy; SSE = Social Self-Efficacy; EI = Emotional Intelligence; SEA = Self-emotions appraisal; ROE = Regulation of Emotions; UOE = Use of Emotion; OEA = Others-Emotion Appraisal; ER = Emotion Regulation

The First Research Question

The first research question asked if there are any significant relationships among Iranian EFL students' emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and emotion regulation. The results of the direct relationships among the variables are presented in Table 2. The analysis, as shown in Table 2, revealed The Spearman's rho correlation analysis reveals a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ER and SE ($r = .178$, $p = .007$) and a slightly stronger significant correlation between ER and EI ($r = .249$, $p < .001$). However, no significant relationship is found between SE and ER ($r = .052$, $p = .434$).

Table 2

Results of Direct Relationships of Research Variables

			ER Mean	SE Mean	EI Mean
Spearman's rho	**ER Mean**	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.178**	.249**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.007	.000
		N	239	225	232
	SE Mean	Correlation Coefficient	.178**	1.000	.052
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.	.434
		N	225	233	226
	EI Mean	Correlation Coefficient	.249**	.052	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.434	.
		N	232	226	241

The Second and Third Research Questions

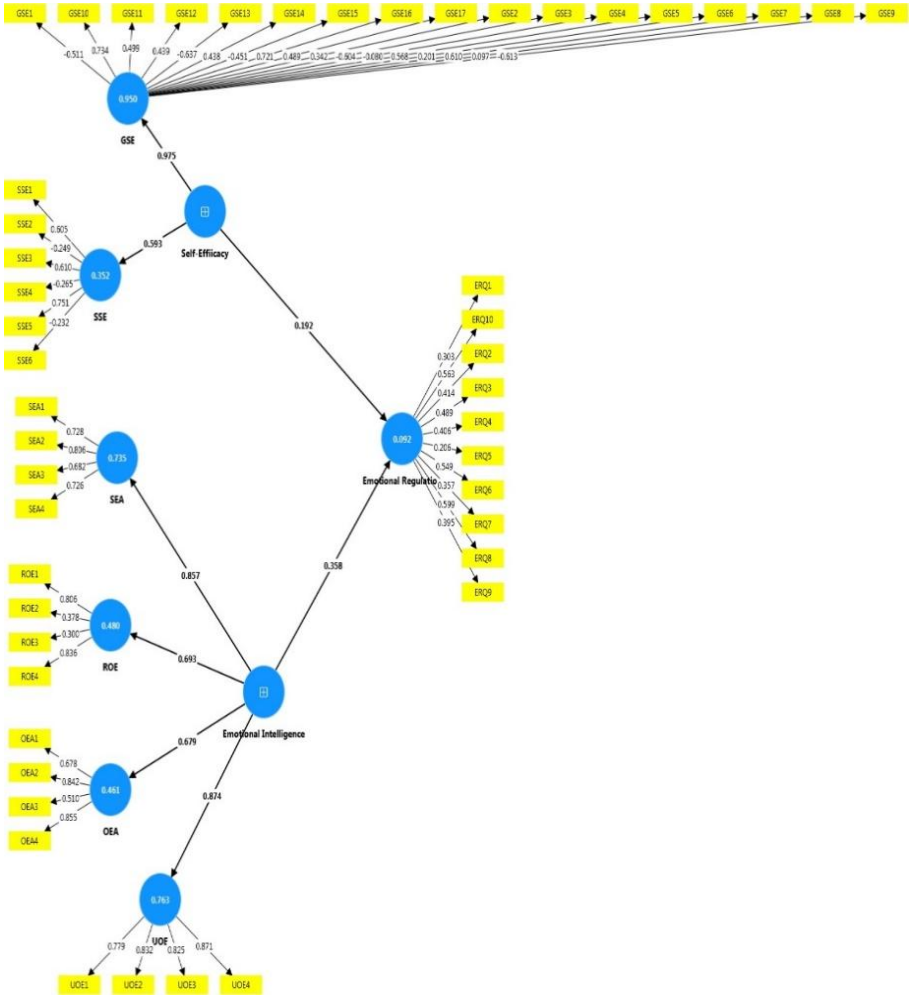
To find the predictive power of the independent variables (i.e., SE and EI) in the dependent variable (i.e., ER) the output of SmartPLS software was utilized; inferential statistics were employed to assess the questionnaire's validity and reliability, examine variable correlations, and ultimately test the research hypotheses. Model fit was assessed using outer model (measurement model) and inner model (structural model) evaluations.

Model Specification

This stage involves the formal specification of the model and is crucial in structural equation modeling (SEM). No analysis can proceed without the researcher first specifying the model, outlining the relationships between variables. This stage includes formulating an expression regarding a set of parameters. In SEM, these parameters represent the nature of the relationships between variables. SEM determines the magnitude and sign of these parameters. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the research models, showing estimated and significant factor loadings and path coefficients. These models allow for the estimation and subsequent testing of factor loadings and path coefficients.

Figure 1

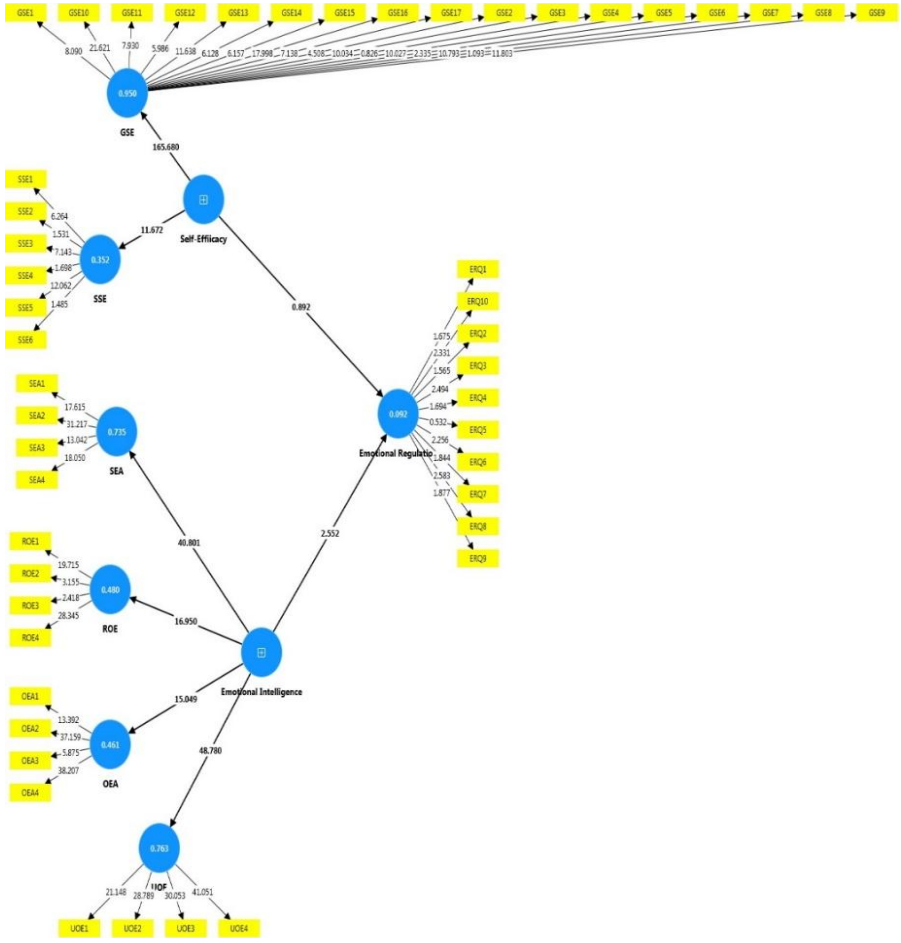
Research Model with Estimated Path Coefficients



The path diagrams feature two distinct types of coefficients. The first, termed factor loadings, represent the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators (rectangles). The second, path coefficients, define the structural relationships between the latent variables themselves and are used for hypothesis testing. All estimated coefficients are assessed for significance using t-statistics. Furthermore, the magnitude of a factor loading reflects an indicator's relative contribution to its underlying construct, with higher loadings denoting greater importance.

Figure 2

Research Model with Absolute Values of Significant Coefficients



Outer Model (Measurement Model) Assessment

The outer model assessment involves examining the reliability and validity of the constructs and research instruments. To assess construct reliability, three indices are used: composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Reliability Assessment

Reliability assessment in path analysis begins with the evaluation of factor loadings, which measure the strength of the relationship between latent variables and their observed indicators. A factor loading indicates how well an observed variable reflects its underlying construct. A higher loading suggests that the indicator plays a significant role in defining the construct, while a negative loading

implies an inverse relationship, often due to reverse-coded items in the measurement scale. Factor loadings typically range between 0 and 1 in absolute value. According to established guidelines (Kline, 1994), loadings below 0.3 are considered weak and are usually excluded from analysis. Loadings between 0.3 and 0.6 are deemed acceptable, though they may benefit from further refinement. Loadings exceeding 0.6 are highly desirable, as they indicate a strong association between the indicator and the construct. These criteria help researchers assess whether their measurement model is reliable and whether the observed variables effectively represent the intended latent constructs.

As shown in Table 3, all factor loadings exceed 0.5, indicating that the measurement items possess adequate validity. This satisfies the first condition for establishing reliability. The third criterion for evaluating reliability involves assessing the CR of each construct. Following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) guidelines, construct reliability is determined using three key metrics: CR, AVE, and factor loadings. For a construct to be considered reliable, the CR value should exceed 0.7, while the AVE should be above 0.5. However, MacKenzie et al. (1996) suggest that an AVE of at least 0.4 may also be acceptable in certain cases.

Table 3

Factor Loadings of Indicators for Each Variable

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Variable	Item	Factor Loading
GSE	GSE1	0.511	**SSE**	SSE1	0.605
	GSE2	0.342		SSE2	0.249
	GSE3	0.604		SSE3	0.61
	GSE4	0.08		SSE4	0.265
	GSE5	0.568		SSE5	0.751
	GSE6	0.201		SSE6	0.232
	GSE7	0.61	**SEA**	SEA1	0.728
	GSE8	0.097		SEA2	0.806
	GSE9	0.613		SEA3	0.682
	GSE10	0.734		SEA4	0.726
	GSE11	0.499	**ROE**	ROE1	0.806
	GSE12	0.439		ROE2	0.378
	GSE13	0.637		ROE3	0.3
	GSE14	0.438		ROE4	0.836
	GSE15	0.451	**UOE**	UOE1	0.779
	GSE16	0.721		UOE2	0.832
	GSE17	0.489		UOE3	0.825
ER	ERQ1	0.303		UOE4	0.871
	ERQ2	0.414	**OEA**	OEA	0.678
	ERQ3	0.489		OEA	0.842
	ERQ4	0.406		OEA	0.51
	ERQ5	0.206		OEA	0.855
	ERQ6	0.549			
	ERQ7	0.357			
	ERQ8	0.599			
	ERQ9	0.395			
	ERQ10	0.563			

For the reliability of measurement instruments, as presented in Table 4, all variables demonstrated alpha values exceeding the 0.7 threshold following validity testing, confirming satisfactory internal consistency. Additionally, the measurement model meets all established reliability criteria, with AVE values surpassing 0.5 and CR scores exceeding 0.7 for every construct. These results collectively demonstrate that the research instrument possesses strong psychometric properties and meets the required standards for reliable measurement.

Table 4
Construct Reliability Assessment

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
ER	0.851	0.829	0.738
EI	0.855	0.883	0.791
SE	0.844	0.837	0.728

Validity Assessment

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assesses the extent to which each construct correlates with its own questions (indicators). To calculate convergent validity, AVE is used. A minimum AVE of 0.5 indicates adequate convergent validity. Table 2 shows the AVE for the constructs. Since the AVE for the model's constructs is greater than 0.5, this confirms the model's adequate convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess Discriminant validity (Table 5).

	EI	ER	GSE	OEA	ROE	SEA	SSE	SE	UOE
EI	0.581								
ER	0.255	0.444							
GSE	-0.538	-0.017	0.50						
OEA	0.679	0.196	-0.32	0.73					
ROE	0.693	0.252	-0.30	0.32	0.69				
SEA	0.857	0.166	-0.41	0.47	0.50	0.93			
SSE	-0.272	0.058	0.39	-0.20	-0.16	-0.21	0.49		
SE	-0.534	0.001	0.97	-0.33	-0.29	-0.41	0.59	0.65	
UOE	0.874	0.212	-0.57	0.41	0.51	0.65	-0.2	-0.55	0.89

According to this criterion, a latent variable should have greater variance with its own observed variables than with other latent variables to demonstrate high discriminant validity. Discriminant validity of the measurement model is confirmed if the diagonal values (typically the square root of AVE) for each latent variable are greater than its correlations with other latent variables in the model.

Inner Model (Structural Model) Assessment

The assessment of structural model validity relies significantly on examining the coefficient of determination (R^2) for dependent latent variables. Chin (1998) described R^2 values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 in PLS path modeling as weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively. The obtained R^2 values indicate acceptable explanatory power for the research's dependent latent variables. Unlike covariance-based approaches that use numerous model fit indices, the PLS approach lacks a "chi-square"-based fit index to examine the congruence between the theoretical model and the collected data. This is due to the predictive nature of PLS. The Q^2 statistic can be used to assess the predictive relevance of each dependent variable. A positive Q^2 value indicates adequate predictive relevance (Amani, Khezri Azar, & Mahmoudi, 2012). If the Q^2 value is positive for all dependent variables, their average can be used as an indicator of the overall quality of the structural model (Azar et al., 2012). As shown in Tables 4 and 5, the present analysis meets these criteria, with all dependent variables exhibiting positive Q^2 values.

Unlike covariance-based structural equation modeling that employs multiple fit indices, the PLS approach – being prediction-oriented – does not utilize Chi-square-based goodness-of-fit measures to evaluate theoretical model congruence with empirical data. Instead, researchers examine predictive relevance through the Q^2 statistic (Stone-Geisser criterion). As established by Amani et al. (2012), any positive Q^2 value confirms a model's predictive adequacy for its corresponding endogenous construct. Furthermore, when all dependent variables demonstrate positive Q^2 values (as shown in Table 6), their collective average serves as a comprehensive indicator of the structural model's overall predictive quality (Azar et al., 2012).

Table 6
Indices of Latent Variables

	R-square	Q^2
ER	0.892	0.084
GSE	0.950	0.150
OEA	0.461	0.259
ROE	0.480	0.178
SEA	0.735	0.134
SSE	0.352	0.049
UOE	0.763	0.262

For the overall model, the average communality is 0.748, and the average R^2 is 0.892. Based on the formula, the overall model fit (GoF) is 0.817, indicating a strong model fit.

Predictive accuracy was assessed using key metrics, including the coefficient of determination (R^2). The obtained R^2 value of 0.892 reveals that the model accounts for 89.2% of the variance in the outcome construct. Aligned with

Chin's (1998) benchmarks, this substantial result attests to the model's robust explanatory power and validates the postulated relationships within the theoretical framework.

Second, the model's predictive relevance was assessed through the Q^2 index, derived using the blindfolding procedure in SmartPLS software. The obtained Q^2 value of 0.284 exceeds the minimum threshold of zero required for predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017) and surpasses the 0.25 benchmark indicating moderate predictive power. These results collectively demonstrate that the proposed model not only explains a significant portion of variance in the dependent variable but also exhibits adequate predictive capability for future observations. The combination of strong explanatory power (R^2) and satisfactory predictive relevance (Q^2) suggests that the theoretical model is both statistically robust and practically meaningful for the research context.

To strengthen the robustness of our findings, we performed PLS-Predict analysis to evaluate the model's out-of-sample predictive power. The comparative analysis of prediction errors revealed consistent superiority of our partial least squares (PLS) model over the benchmark linear model (LM). Specifically, for all measured indicators, the PLS model demonstrated lower root mean square error (RMSE) values compared to the linear model counterpart. This pattern of results was similarly observed for mean absolute error (MAE) metrics.

These findings provide compelling evidence for the model's strong predictive performance. The consistently smaller prediction errors in the PLS model suggest that our specified independent variables not only account for substantial variance in the dependent construct but also generate more accurate out-of-sample predictions than conventional linear modeling approaches. This enhanced predictive capability further validates the theoretical and practical relevance of our research model.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to delineate the relationships among EI, SE, and ER in a sample of Iranian EFL learners and to assess the predictive capacity of EI and SE on ER. The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between EI and ER, thereby corroborating previous scholarly work (Gross, 2015; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This result implies that heightened emotional intelligence equips learners with a greater facility for effective emotion regulation, often manifested through the use of strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015). The strong predictive role of EI in ER underscores its importance in language learning, where emotional challenges like anxiety and frustration are common (Derakhshan, 2022).

The weak but significant SE-ER correlation ($r = .178$, $p = .007$) contradicts Bandura's (1997) assertion that self-efficacy directly enhances emotional control. This discrepancy may reflect developmental and cultural nuances. The participants (ages 10–15) likely lack the metacognitive maturity to translate SE beliefs into

consistent ER strategies (Schunk, 1995). Additionally, Iran's education system, which prioritizes rote memorization over socioemotional learning (Pishghadam, 2009), may dilute SE's impact on ER. Critics might argue that the study's SE measure (general rather than language-specific efficacy) obscured domain-specific effects. Yet, even if tailored to language tasks, SE's modest role here suggests that confidence alone cannot override emotional hurdles without targeted ER instruction. This challenges the "more confidence equals better outcomes" mantra pervasive in education policy.

The non-significant SE-EI correlation defies literature positing their interdependence (Hashemi &Ghanizadeh, 2011). One explanation is compensatory overconfidence: learners with lower EI may inflate SE beliefs to cope with emotional gaps, while high-EI learners critically self-assess, lowering SE scores. Alternatively, cultural pressures to perform academically might decouple SE from emotional awareness (Wang et al., 2014). This dissonance implies that interventions boosting SE (e.g., praise-based feedback) could backfire if not paired with EI development. For instance, a learner confident in grammar drills (high SE) but unable to manage frustration (low EI) may still disengage. Thus, the study rebuts the assumption that SE and EI naturally co-evolve in educational settings.

The second research question examined whether EI could predict ER. The analysis indicated that EI significantly and positively predicted ER, supporting Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model of EI as a foundational skill for emotional management. This relationship aligns with previous research showing that individuals with higher EI are more likely to use adaptive regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal (Gross, 2015). Within the EFL context, where learners oftenencounter anxiety and frustration (Derakhshan, 2022), EI components such as emotional awareness and understanding appear crucial for effective emotion modulation. However, the moderate strength of this relationship suggests EI operates alongside other factors, potentially including classroom climate or personality traits (Solhi et al., 2023). The findings strongly support incorporating EI development into language curricula, particularly in contexts like Iran where traditional education may neglect emotional skills (Pishghadam, 2009). Future interventions should focus on cultivating specific EI competencies that directly support emotion regulation in language learning situations.

Although the current findings are consistent with earlier research that underscores the influential role of emotional intelligence (EI) in enhancing emotion regulation (ER), this study contributes a distinct perspective by situating these constructs within the socio-cultural and developmental context of adolescent Iranian EFL learners. The results indicate that EI serves as a stronger predictor of ER than self-efficacy (SE), suggesting that emotional competencies play a particularly salient role in coping with the affective challenges of language learning—an aspect often underemphasized in cognitively oriented educational environments. Contrary to Bandura's (1997) proposition that SE directly shapes emotional control, the modest relationship observed here implies that self-efficacy may exert only an indirect influence on ER. Consequently, pedagogical interventions designed to

foster emotion regulation might benefit from incorporating contextually sensitive strategies that strengthen both learners' emotional and efficacy beliefs. By interpreting the results through this culturally informed lens, the present discussion extends previous findings and offers practical implications for EFL instruction and emotional skills training.

The results of this study carry important implications for language learning and teaching. First, the demonstrated significant relationship between EI and ERhighlights the necessity of incorporating emotional skills training into language curricula. By teaching learners how to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions, educators can help them manage the emotional difficulties of language learning more effectively. This, in turn, could lead to enhanced academic achievement and greater overall satisfaction with the learning process.

Conclusion

In summary, this research contributes to the extant body of knowledge by delineating the relationships among Emotional Intelligence (EI), self-efficacy (SE), and emotion regulation (ER) within an Iranian EFL context. The findings foreground the fundamental importance of EI in underpinning adaptive ER, positing that pedagogical interventions aimed at cultivating emotional competencies could significantly improve learners' management of affective demands. Conversely, the absence of a significant SE-ER relationship challenges prevailing assumptions and highlights the imperative for a more refined, culturally-situated theoretical model. Such scholarly refinement is a prerequisite for designing empirically-grounded and pedagogically responsive learning atmospheres that concurrently facilitate emotional and educational development.

The study also calls for further research to explore the contextual and cultural factors that may influence these relationships. In conclusion, while EI emerges as a cornerstone of emotion regulation in language learning, the role of SE appears context-dependent. These findings advocate for a paradigm shift in EFL pedagogy, prioritizing emotional literacy alongside linguistic competence to cultivate resilient, adaptive learners.

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