Predicting Enjoyment of Learning English Based on Emotional Intelligence, Willingness to Communicate, and Self-Disclosure

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Enjoyment of language learning (ELL) is recognized as the most commonly experienced positive emotion in foreign language learning. The present study set out to investigate the relationships between English language learners' ELL as the outcome variable and the three factors of emotional intelligence (EI), willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2, and self-disclosure (SD) as the predictor variables. To this end, 147 Iranian English language learners (109 female and 38 male), aged 8 to 50, participated in the study. They were selected through convenience sampling from a population of Iranian foreign language learners studying English at different levels in Tehran. Quantitative data on the predictor and outcome variables were collected through relevant standardized questionnaires. Pearson correlation tests, linear regression analyses, and multiple regression analyses were performed to answer the research questions. Based on the findings, ELL demonstrated moderate to strong positive correlations with EI (.24, p≤ .05), WTC (.54, p≤ .05), and SD (.53, p≤ .05). Regression analysis also revealed that the three predictor variables of the study (EI, WTC, and SD) predicted 41 percent of the variance of ELL as reported by the targeted Iranian learners. The findings of the study contribute to

the trends in research and instruction that attempt to identify the factors contributing to learners' enjoyment of language learning.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, enjoyment of language learning, self-disclosure, willingness to communicate in L2.

Thanks to recent findings in positive psychology and control value theory, language learners' emotional side of the character and especially positive emotions are no longer neglected. Second language acquisition (SLA) is an emotional process (Oladrostam et al., 2022) accompanied by a range of positive and negative feelings. Indeed, emotions influence learners' cognitive system, identity development, and motivation (Pishghadam et al., 2016). Moreover, learners' mental state plays an influential role in their language performance. The majority of studies targeting emotions in the field of SLA have, however, traditionally looked at negative emotions like stress, anxiety, fear, negative attitude, and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Research on many of the positive emotions like pride, joy, self-confidence, and enjoyment is in its infancy.

Enjoyment of language learning (ELL), which is one of the most commonly experienced positive emotions in second language acquisition (Li et al., 2020), empowers learners to cope with the harmful effects of negative emotions, boosts their perseverance to overcome language learning difficulties, and helps them to understand their lessons more easily (Ahmadi-Azad et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there is little research looking at how ELL itself may be affected by other individual difference variables. A glance at current research studies conducted on ELL reveals that they mainly explore its effects on FLCA and learners' overall performance (e.g., Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Pavelescu & Petrić, 2018). To identify variables that may

increase learners' ELL, comprehensive studies are, therefore, needed with empirical data from different populations of learners. So far, related research has shown that learners' level of ELL is influenced by various factors, such as psychological and social factors (Li et al., 2020), EI (Chen et al., 2021), WTC in L2 (Khajavy et al., 2018), and SD (Henry & Thorsen, 2021). Even though these may not be the only variables that contribute to the increase of enjoyment experienced by language learners, the current study focused on learners' EI, WTC, and SD to contribute data to the existing research.

The variable of EI plays a key role in coping with negative emotions, such as FLCA (Ali & Ali, 2016). EI has also been shown to play an important role in increasing learners' self-esteem, general well-being, mental health, and better academic performance (Trigueros et al., 2020). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, in the context of FLL, most studies on EI have focused on its impact on learners' L2 proficiency, as evidenced by studies conducted by Li (2020), MacCann et al. (2020), Taherkhani and Moradi (2022), and Trigueros et al. (2020). However, investigating the relationship between EI and learners' ELL, which is one of the objectives of this study, requires more attention in Iran and other countries.

WTC is another factor considered to contribute to the learners' ELL. It is generally regarded as one of the most important aspects of SLA (Wang et al., 2021). Indeed, the development of learners' WTC improves not only their speaking skills, but also their ability in listening, reading, and writing (Taherkhani & Moradi, 2022). Experiencing positive and negative emotions can, directly and indirectly, affect learners' WTC (Khajavy et al., 2018). In particular, FLCA and ELL are

known to be the strongest predictors of learners' WTC in L2 (Dewaele, 2019). Several studies have investigated factors contributing to learners' WTC in L2 (e.g., Bensalem, 2021, Ebn-Abbasi & Nushi, 2022, and Wang et al., 2021). However, as far as the researcher is aware, the relationship between learners' WTC in L2 and their ELL, which is one of the objectives of this study, has been neglected and requires extensive studies.

SD is the third variable explored in this study as a possible contributor to language learners' ELL. It is believed that encouraging learners to disclose their personal information, feelings, emotions, and language learning experiences (Wood et al., 2014) not only creates a friendly classroom atmosphere (Qin, 2022) but can also encourage students to participate more fully in class activities (Borshuk, 2017). In addition, SD provides teachers with the opportunity to obtain valuable information about the needs and characteristics of their learners (Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2020). However, to the researchers' best of knowledge, most related studies have focused on teachers' SD (e.g., Safaei & Shahrokhi, 2019), and learners' SD needs further investigation. Based on this introduction, the novelty of the current research on positive emotions in SLA, is that it not only explores new relationships, but also focuses on ELL as an outcome rather than a predictor variable in an attempt to fill the gap of studies on the relationship between learner variables and their ELL.

As a matter of fact, numerous factors influence learners' ELL that in turn contributes to language learning. Of these contributing factors, the present study focused on EI, WTC, and SD. Even though several studies have separately examined ELL (e.g., Kushkiev, 2019), EI (e.g., Dawood, 2021) WTC (e.g.,

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Dastgoshadeh & Javanmardi, 2021), and SD (e.g., Rosborough et al., 2021), there are few studies on the relationship between EI, WTC, and SD on the one hand and ELL on the other. Previous research has not shown how much of the variation in learners' ELL may be related to fluctuations in their EI, WTC, and SD. More specifically, the preset research addressed the following questions:

1) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' emotional intelligence (EI) and their ELL?

2) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' Willingness to communicate (WTC) and their ELL?

3) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-disclosure) SD and their ELL?

4) How much of the variation in learners' ELL is related to the three variables of EI, WTC in L2, and SD?

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE)

The emergence of PP has highlighted the influential role of positive emotions, such as optimism, joy, and interest, on learners' well-being and performance (Oladrostam et al., 2022). The concept of PP was first formally described in Positive Psychology, published by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) (Wang et al., 2023). Generally, PP assumes that positive emotions play crucial roles in preventing the destructive effects of negative emotions, such as depression, and increasing learners' creativity, motivation, and persistence (Oladrostam et al., 2022). Inspired by the PP movement, Barbara Fredrikson (2001) proposed the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. This theory assumes that positive emotions can expand an individual's current repertoire of thoughts and actions

and enhance his or her abilities. In other words, positive emotions such as joy, love, and pride expand human cognitive abilities and add flexible value to behaviors. These expanded repertoires of thought and action create lasting physical, intellectual, and social resources and contribute to sustained efforts and actions. In the case of FLL, for example, students who have had pleasurable experiences in FL learning participate more actively in learning activities and related tasks (Mohammadipour et al., 2018). Following the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, Pekrun (2006) proposed the control-value theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006). According to the theory, the learner's expectation of an ultimate achievement is a proximal predictor of his or her emotions (Tze et al., 2022). In other words, the end goal determines the type of emotions (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017). The control-value theory states that the process of FLL is accompanied by a range of emotions and an individual's control-value system serves as a criterion for analyzing the causes and outcomes of the emotions experienced during the learning process (Wu et al., 2021). For example, if learners value good grades, failing the final exam may lead to FLCA (Ning, 2023).

In line with the increasing trend of studies on positive emotions in the context of SLA, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) introduced the concept of ELL by developing the 21-item Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) (Botes et al., 2021). Since ELL is considered the most commonly experienced positive emotion in language learning (Li et al., 2020), empirical studies on the effects of this factor on FLL have been extended, albeit insufficiently. For example, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) conducted a survey to measure learners' levels of FLE and

FLCA. A total of 1746 FL learners of different nationalities participated in the study. The participants showed a relatively high level of ELL. The study suggests that enjoyment makes learners more creative, expands their physical and mental abilities, and develops their language potential. The study also considered learners' assessment of their FL abilities, the number of languages they know, and cultural background as factors contributing to their ELL and FLCA.

Dewaele & Alfawzan (2018) conducted a study to investigate the effect of ELL and FLCA on the language performance of the two groups of FL learners: a total of 189 FL learners in London and 152 FL learners in Saudi Arabia. The results were the same for both groups of participants. According to the findings, learners with higher levels of ELL and lower levels of FLCA performed better in the final exams. The results also showed that in-class activities were the most influential sources of ELL and FLCA for Arab learners. According to the study, this highlights the importance of raising teachers' awareness of the emotional dimension of FLL.

Nemati et al. (2020) conducted a study to investigate the level of ELL and public speaking anxiety of Iranian EFL learners. According to the results, the majority of the participants reported moderate levels of ELL and low levels of public speaking anxiety. The study identified teachers, classroom atmosphere, and educational activities as the most influential factors contributing to Iranian EFL learners' ELL. The results also demonstrated that low self-confidence, exam stress, and negative feedback were associated with participants' speech anxiety. The findings highlighted the critical role of teachers in reducing learners' FLCA and creating a friendly and pleasant

atmosphere that encourages students to participate in class activities. The research suggests that to reduce learners' FLCA teachers should avoid comparing them. In addition, low lexical knowledge was identified as another cause of speaking anxiety.

In an attempt to examine the associations between ELL, L2 motivation, and FL achievements, Wang et al. (2023) carried out a study among Chinese EFL learners. The results demonstrated that ELL was the strongest predictor of learners' FL proficiencies and motivation. Besides, the study identified teachers' personality traits, including extroversion and openness, as an effective factors in increasing learners' ELL. Furthermore, according to the results, students with higher levels of FL proficiency showed higher levels of ELL and motivation.

Emotional intelligence (EI)

According to (Zuanazzi et al., 2022), the study of Thorndike (1920) on the role of social intelligence in social interaction highlighted the other aspects of human intelligence. Subsequently, in 1983, Gardner introduced the theory of multiple intelligences. According to this theory, eight types of intelligence contribute to human behavior and response, including personal, verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, existential, logical-mathematical, and naturalistic intelligence (Alavi & Esmaeilifard, 2021). A little later, Reuven Bar-on (1985) introduced the concept of EI, defining it as the people's social and emotional competencies which determine their abilities to understand, control, and express themselves, to understand others, and to shape their social interactions. Reuven Bar-on developed the Bar-OnEQ-I scale to measure five scales of individuals' EI (Esmaeeli et al., 2018), including self-awareness and self-expression, Social

awareness and interpersonal relationship, Emotion management, Adaptability and Change management, and self-motivation (Bar-On, R., 2006).

In 1998, Goleman proposed the five key components of EI and suggested that the key aspects of EI can be grouped into five categories: motivation, self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, and empathy (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018). In late 1998, shortly after Golemen's theory, Petrides developed the complete form of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), which contains 153 items related to 15 facets of four interrelated factors of EI (Petrides, 2009). These facets and factors are self-control (emotion regulation, impulsivity, stress management, adaptability, self-motivation), well-being (self-esteem, optimism, happiness), sociability (social awareness, assertiveness, emotion management), and emotionality (empathy, emotion recognition, emotion expression, relationships) (Siegling et al., 2014). Self-control refers to the degree of determination and the ability to deal with difficult situations and negative emotions. High scores on the well-being factor indicate higher levels of self-esteem, positive feelings, and life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2021). The factor of sociability is characterized by the ability to conduct satisfying social interactions clearly and confidently. People with high scores on emotionality are more able to perceive their own emotions and those of others. They are also able to express their feelings effectively. In 2001, Petrides designed the short form of the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (i.e. the TEIQue- SF. TEIQue- SF), which contains 30 items covering two of the 15 facets of TEIQue) (Petrides, 2009).

Examining the role of EI in SLA has attracted the attention of several researchers worldwide. For example, Manzouri & Movahed (2017) conducted a study investigating the relationship between EI, FLA, and FL proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. The results showed a positive correlation between learners' EI and their language proficiency. Moreover, participants with higher EI levels rated themselves as more proficient in FL. According to the study, teachers can use various strategies, including journal writing, role-playing, and group discussion, especially for learners who do not have enough opportunities outside of class to use FL, to improve learners' mental health, alleviate their anxiety, and increase their WTC in L2.

A study was conducted by Esmaeeli et al. (2018) to investigate the relationship between EI and the speaking skills of Iranian advanced EFL learners. The results showed that learners with higher levels of EI had higher levels of speaking proficiency. The study argues that encouraging learners to participate in group discussions and openly share their feelings would help improve their EI, self-confidence, and sociability. To understand the effects of EI on language performance, Zokaee & Suzani (2020) conducted a study among Iranian FL learners. The results demonstrated the positive relationship between the two variables. According to the study, the reason behind this correlation may be the fact that a certain level of EI is proved to be the fundamental characteristic of people who are interested in learning a new language. Moreover, high levels of EI help learners take creative actions to pave the way for FLL.

Dastgoshadeh & Javanmardi (2021) conducted a study in Iran to investigate the role of EI in WTC in L2. Data analysis showed

that EI was a good predictor of learners' WTC in L2. According to the study, this may be explained by the fact that learners with higher EI usually have greater interests in interpersonal communication.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

According to MacIntyre et al. (2001), the concept of WTC was first introduced by McCroskey and Baer (1985), who focused on WTC in L1 and described it as voluntarily participating in communication. In 1998, MacIntyr developed the heuristic model to show the predictors of WTC in L2. According to the model, the ultimate goal of FLL is to enable learners to communicate in FL in actual situations (Hashemi, 2019, p. 27). The base of the pyramid, layer VI, represents the interaction between the social context in which communication occurs and the communicators' personalities (Jafari & Deghati, 2016). According to the model, intergroup climate indirectly influences WTC in L2 (Hashemi, 2019, p. 30) by imposing specific values, attitudes, prejudices, and discriminations. Personality traits such as extroversion and open-mindedness can influence WTC. As the model shows, affective-cognitive factors also contribute to WTC in L2. The Learner's intergroup attitudes, which refer to one's tendency to fit into a particular L2 community, also contribute to WTC in FL. Furthermore, experiencing satisfying and enjoyable L2 communication leads to more communicative competence and further WTC. Generally, communicative competence refers to a combination of several competencies, such as linguistic and sociocultural competence. This skill improves learners' confidence in their L2 and motivates them to communicate with L2 speakers in their groups and representatives of the other L2 communities. In

general, anxiety levels and perceived communication skills influence L2 confidence and WTC (Jafari& Deghati, 2016).

Khajavy et al. (2018) were intended to investigate the relationship between classroom environment, positive and negative emotions, and WTC in L2. The participants were Iranian secondary school students. Data analysis revealed that ELL and a positive classroom climate were contributing factors in promoting learners' WTC and reducing their anxiety. According to the research, teachers should be skillful in creating a challenging but supportive and friendly environment through appropriate strategies, such as bringing up exciting topics for class discussions along with appropriate feedbacks.

The study of Çetin & Kılıçkaya (2019) among Turkish FL learners reported that some factors, such as FLA, FL proficiency, characteristics of the interlocutor, and topic of the conversation were among the influential factors in WTC in L2. In addition, the study suggests that constant use of L2 with native and non-native interlocutors and travel abroad are useful measures to improve FL proficiency and WTC in L2. Taherkhani & Moradi (2022) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between EI, self-regulation, and WTC in L2 and reading comprehension skills of Iranian FL learners. The results showed that developing learners' EI, WTC in L2, and self-regulation, promoted their reading comprehension skills. According to the results, improving learners' self-regulation of emotional states and motivation, as well as encouraging them to actively engage in learning tasks and classroom activities, lead to higher levels of FL proficiency.

In an attempt to find out the predictors of Iranian medical students' WTC in an English course, Gharehbaghi (2022)

conducted an investigation. The results showed that the levels of learners' shyness, motivation, and self-confidence were the strongest predictors of their WTC in English. According to the study, more motivated learners had higher levels of perceived communication skills, which led them to more WTC in L2. According to the results, teachers play crucial roles in reducing learners' shyness and increasing their motivation and self-confidence. The study recommends that teachers take effective actions, such as designing in-class activities according to learners' characteristics, interests, and emotional states without giving instant feedback on their mistakes, to encourage them to use FL as often as possible.

Self-disclosure (SD)

The origin of SD goes back to psychotherapy, in which patients are asked to reveal their personal experiences, feelings, and emotions in therapy sessions (Kreiner & Levi-Belz, 2019). SD was first introduced by Jourard in 1959 when he proposed the association between individuals' thoughts, needs, beliefs, feelings, and mental health (Moriwaki, 1973). He asserted that SD improves the quality of people's relationships and helps them develop a better understanding of each other's perceptions, feelings, and actual needs (Zhu, 2019). Jourdad's comments inspired researchers to investigate the effects of SD on FL performance. For example, Doring et al. (2014) conducted a study in the U.S. to examine the correlation between learners' demographic characteristics and their propensity to SD. Analysis of the data revealed no significant correlation between gender and age and learners' inclination to SD. The results also showed that students with college degrees were more willing to share personal information about their education, work, and

personal relationships than learners without college degrees. The study suggests that instructors should be mindful of their students' privacy and create a safe and supportive atmosphere in the classroom where students feel comfortable disclosing themselves.

Jebbour & Mouaid (2019) examined the influence of teachers' SD on Moroccan FL learners' participation in class. The results showed that teachers' SD, for example, about their personal experiences, hobbies, and opinions, was a contributing factor to creating a happy and friendly classroom atmosphere to encourage learners to participate in discussions and in-class activities. Chernyavskaya et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine the predictors of the learners' willingness to SD in Vladivostok. Their results identified self-confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to discover and express one's competencies as the predictive factors of learners' willingness to SD in class. Elahi Shirvan & Taherian (2020) conducted a survey to find out the relationship between teachers' SD and ELL of Iranian FL learners and found a positive correlation between the two variables and suggested that a friendly class atmosphere resulting from SD creates a supportive and positive environment that leads to ELL.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on ELL, EI, WTC in L2, and SD, there are few studies, especially in the Iranian context, that address the relationship between FL learners' EI, WTC in L2, and SD and their ELL. Moreover, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a lack of research on examining the variations in FL learners' ELL based on the variations in their EI, WTC, and SD.

Method

The study used a basic quantitative design and all of the central variables of the study were numerically measured. Regression analyses were used to examine the variations in EFL learners' ELL as a result of variations in their individual differences (EI, WTC and SD). These predictor variables were measured using standardized questionnaires and were analyzed using linear and multiple regression analyses.

The study targeted the population of Iranian EFL learners experiencing formal instruction in public and private institutions in Tehran. The research setting was all districts in Tehran and participants were selected from this population through clustered sampling to allow for enough variation is the sample. A total number of 147 Iranian EFL learners (109 females and 38 males) provided answers for all the instruments in the survey making up the final sample size (the response rate for this study was 73.5%). Although the participants were selected from different districts (i.e., north, south, east, and west of Tehran), most of them were from the sixth, seventh, and twelfth districts reflecting the intensity of the learner population in these areas of Tehran. The participants were from different age groups, ranged from 8 to 50 years old. Most of the participants (54.4 percent) were in the age range of 36-50 (the mean and SD of the participants' ages were 3.31 and 0.88, respectively). According to the participants' self-report, they belonged to different levels of English language proficiency, including elementary (39.5 percent, with the frequency of 58), pre-intermediate (22.4 percent, with the frequency of 33), intermediate (27.2 percent, with the frequency of 40), and advanced (10.9 percent, with the frequency of 16). Most of the participants were at an elementary

level of English language proficiency (39.5 percent), according to their self-report. Participants were targeted at public and private schools (about 10 percent), language institutes (about 65 percent), and universities (about 25 percent). However, the majority of the respondents were from FL institutes, again indicating the higher percentage of learners in these centers in the whole population. 15, 96, 37

Instruments

To collect the quantitative data required to answer the research questions, a single 80-item questionnaire consisting of four self-report questionnaires related to the four variables of the study, namely ELL, EI, WTC in L2, and SD, was administered. The decision to merge the instrument was taken because of practicality concerns. The chance to collect sufficient data in one data collection session was greater than that of four different administrations. The questionnaire was provided in the learners' mother tongue to avoid lack of comprehension and back translation and expert opinion were used to make sure the data collection instrument has the required validity. In the following paragraphs, the four sections of the research instrument of the study as well as their psychometric properties are described.

Enjoyment of Language Learning Scale

The 21-item FLES questionnaire developed by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) was used to measure the participants' ELL. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To measure the reliability of the ELL questionnaire Cronbach's Alfa coefficient was used. The estimated reliability of the ELL questionnaire was .90, indicating high reliability. After its construction by

Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014), this instrument has been repeatedly used for the measurement of ELL and proved to be a valid measure.

Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire - Short Form (TEIQue- SF) developed by Petrides (2001) was used to measure participants' levels of EI. The questionnaire was retrieved from the London Psychometric Laboratory website (Psychometriclab.com/obtaining-the-technique). The TEIQue-SF is a 30-item scale designed to assess 15 aspects of an individual's EI. Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was run to measure the reliability of the EI questionnaire and the estimated reliability was .41, indicating weak to moderate reliability. No confirmatory analyses were done for the validity of this instrument. It was however, validated through expert opinion.

Willingness to Communicate Scale

To measure participants' WTC in L2, the study used a questionnaire developed by Darasawang & Reinders (2021). This 21-item scale consists of three parts. The first part contains of four questions that measure communication tasks in which FL learners are willing to engage. Respondents rate the questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unwilling) to 5 (very willing). The second part contains 10 questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that measure FL learners' WTC in L2 in class. The last part deals with the frequency of the participants' communication in the classroom and contains seven questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Cronbach's alpha

coefficient was run to measure the reliability of the WTC questionnaire and the estimated reliability was .67, indicating acceptable reliability. This tool is one of the most common measures of the targeted trait.

Self-disclosure Scale

To measure EFL learners' SD, this study administered Jebbour's (2020) Student Self-disclosure Scale. The questionnaire contains 10 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed a reliability of .93, indicating high reliability.

In order to collect data, the link to an online version of the questionnaire was sent to EFL learners in different language institutes, schools, and universities in Tehran educational districts via WhatsApp, Telegram, email, and SMS. Filling out the questionnaire needed about 30 minutes. The design of the online questionnaire was such that the respondents were required to answer all the questions before sending it. The data collection phase lasted approximately 30 days because the calls for participation had to be sent several times. The link to the questionnaire was sent to more than 200 English language learners randomly selected from the cluster of districts. The response rate for the questionnaire was 73.5%, and 147 responses were received and used for analysis after initial data handling.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was applied to analyze the data. Questionnaire responses were carefully recorded in SPSS datasheet and descriptive measures like frequencies, means, and standard deviations of responses were first calculated. Different inferential procedures were used to

answer the research questions: To compare the mean values of the data with the fixed possible population mean, the one-sample T-test analysis was performed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to measure the normality of the data distribution. To examine the relationship between FL learners' EI, WTC in L2, and SD and their ELL, the Pearson correlation test was run. Linear regression analysis was performed to predict the change in the outcome variable of the study (i.e., ELL) based on the change in the predictor variables (i.e.,EI, WTC in L2, and SD). Finally, to predict the value of FL learners' ELL based on the combination of the predictor variables of the study, multiple regression analysis was performed.

Results

The study population included 323 people and 24.5% (79 people) of them were male and 75.5% (244 people) were female. Also, 49.2% (159 people) of the participants were single, 50.5% (163 people) were married, and 0.3% (1 person) was divorced. The Mean ± SD age of the participants was 34.09 ±7.31 years. The mean, standard deviation and Pearson correlation coefficients of the research variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on ELL, EI, WTC, and SD

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
ELL	147	2.36	.55
EI	147	2.90	.24
WTC	147	**3.56**	.47

| SD | 147 | 2.66 | .91 |

Note. ELL= Enjoyment of Language Learning; EI= Emotional Intelligence; WTC= Willingness to communicate; SD= Self-disclosure.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to check the normality of data distribution for all the variables (Table 2). For ELL, EI, WTC, and SD, significance values were .90, .50, .58, and .22, respectively indicating that all the variables of the study were normally distributed ($p \leq .05$) and parametric statistical tests of regression analysis were applicable considering the required prerequisite conditions.

Table 2

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig.
ELL	147	49.59	11.55	.56	.90
EI	147	**87.06**	7.46	.82	.50
WTC	147	67.70	8.98	.77	.58
SD	147	24.02	8.20	1.04	.22

Note. ELL= Enjoyment of Language Learning; EI= Emotional Intelligence; WTC= Willingness to communicate; SD= Self-disclosure.

Correlation Coefficients for learners' ELL and the three predictor variables of EI, WTC, and SD

Given the normal distribution of the data of ELL and EI, the Pearson correlation test was run to analyze the correlation between the two variables. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Matrix for EI, WTC, SD, and ELL

	ELL	EI	WTC	SD
ELL	1	.24* (Sig.=.00)	.54* (Sig.=.00)	.53* (Sig.=.00)
EI	.24*	1	.20	.16
WTC	.54*	.20	1	.37
SD	.53*	.16	.37	1

Note. ELL= Enjoyment of Language Learning; EI= Emotional Intelligence; WTC=Willingness to Communicate; SD=Self-disclosure.
*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The summary of correlation coefficients reported in Table 3 show a statistically significant weak positive correlation between ELL on the one hand and EI on the other ($r = .24$, p= .00 <.01). Calculated Cohen's effect size values for this correlation ($f 2 = .06$) indicates that the correlation between these two variables is weak, as seen in the correlation matrix. WTC and SD are also correlated with enjoyment of language learning with higher coefficients as shown in Table 3. This correlation matrix shows a statistically significant strong positive correlation between learners' WTC and ELL ($r = .54$, p=.00 <.01), with a Cohen's effect size value of 0.4 indicating a

strong correlation. It also shows that the correlation between learners' self-disclosure and their enjoyment is positive (r = .53, p=.00 <.01) and the calculated Cohen's effect size value (f 2 = .38) indicates that the correlation between these two variables is strong.

Even though correlation analysis showed that the three predictors were positively related to enjoyment of language learning (EI with weak association, SD and WTC with stronger prediction), their cumulative predictive power was not shown in these analyses. Therefore, to investigate the strength of EI, WTC, and SD in predicting changes in learners' language learning enjoyment (ELL), regression analysis was also carried out in response to the fourth reseach question.

Fluctuation in ELL due to variations in the combination of the predictor factors

Unlike the first three research questions that separately investigated the relationships between EI, WTC, and SD on the one hand and ELL on the other; the fourth research question addressed the combined power of these three individual difference variables in predicting enjoyment of language learning. To this end, multiple regression analysis was performed and the predictive power of emotional intelligence alone, its power in combination with willingness to communicate and also with self-disclosure was explored.

Based on the model summary presented in Table 4, emotional intelligence has ignorable predictive validity, but willingness to communicate and self-disclosure predict noticeable variations in enjoyment of language learning.

Table 4

Regression Analysis Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.241[a]	.058	.052	11.25060
2	.555[b]	.308	.298	9.67564
3	.654[c]	.427	.415	8.83389

a. Predictors: (Constant), emotional intelligence

b. Predictors: (Constant), emotional intelligence, willingness

c. Predictors: (Constant), emotional intelligence, willingness, self-disclosure

The summary of the multiple regression model, the R, and adjusted R^2 values is reported in Table 5. The R-value is .65, indicating a high predictive power of the predictor variables of the study (i.e. EI, WTC in L2, and SD). The adjusted R^2 value (.41) indicates that the combination of the predictor variables of the study can explain about 41 percent of the fluctuations in the outcome variable (i.e., ELL). In other words, the coefficient of determination or the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be accounted for by the independent variables (enter method in the model) is a significant measure.

Table 5
Model Summary Table for the Combination of all Variables of the Study

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.65[a]	.42	**.41**	8.83

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence, Willingness to communicate, Self-disclosure.

The reported R^2 value (.42) is the proportion of variation in enjoyment of language learning accounted for by the three variables of EI, WTC, and SD in the regression model above. Based on Table 7, the F-ratio and p-value indicate that the overall regression model fits the data well. The table shows that the independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable (F-ratio = 35.57, p < .0005). The coefficients are depicted in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Coefficients for Enjoyment of Language Learning as the Outcome Variable

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	17.154	10.896		1.574	.118
	intelligence	.373	.125	.241	2.988	.003
2	(Constant)	-13.175	10.271		-1.283	.202
	intelligence	.210	.110	.136	1.916	.057
	willingness	.657	.091	.511	7.214	.000
3	(Constant)	-9.379	9.403		-.997	.320
	intelligence	.155	.101	.100	1.539	.126
	willingness	.485	.089	.377	5.449	.000
	Self-disclosure	.528	.097	.375	5.454	.000

Table 7

ANOVA Table for the Combination of the Variables of the Study

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	8324.13	3	2774.71	35.57	.000[a]
Residual	11159.37	143	78.03		
Total	19483.51	146			

   a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence, Willingness to communicate, Self-disclosure.
   b. Outcome Variable: Enjoyment of Language Learning.

In short, the predictor variables of the study (i.e. EI, WTC in L2, and SD) were not only individually correlated with enjoyment of language learning based on the correlation matrix, but also significantly predicted the variation in the outcome variable based on the regression model an account for a noticeable 41 percent of the variation in enjoyment of language learning.

Discussion

The study explored the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' enjoyment of language learning (ELL) as an outcome variable and EI, WTC, and SD as predictors. Descriptive numerical data were collected on these variables using standardized questionnaires. Pearson correlation and regression analyses were used not only to explore how EI, WTC, and SD relate to enjoyment of language learning but also to measure the predictive power of these variables for ELL. Four statistical

hypotheses were tested and the results were demonstrated: 1) A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was observed between EI and ELL, indicating that increase in learners' EI leads to an increase in levels of ELL. Moreover, variations in EI contributed to five percent of the variation in the learners' ELL. 2) A strong and statistically significant positive correlation between WTC and ELL was found indicating that learners who are more willing to communicate in L2 enjoy their L2 learning more. Results also indicated that 28 percent of the variation in ELL can be attributed to WTC. 3) A strong positive correlation was also seen between Iranian FL learners' SD and their ELL which explained 28 percent of the variation in ELL. 4) Multiple regression analysis showed that, in combination, the three predictor variables of the study (i.e., EI, WTC, SD) can predict about 41 percent of the variance in learners' enjoyment of language learning and that WTC in L2 is the strongest predictor.

In general, the relationship between EI and ELL can be justified by the fact that EI enables learners to manage their negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, fear, and self-doubt. In addition, it influences learners' self-confidence (Ali & Ali, 2016). Self-confidence influences one's cognitive system, success, and happiness. Language learners with high levels of self-confidence are more motivated and have more perseverance in overcoming L2 learning difficulties. Low self-confidence can prevent learners from realizing their potentials. This is because low self-confidence causes learners to experience constant anxiety about the course, teacher, classroom activities, and communication in L2 (Hayrettin, 2015). Furthermore, the influential role of EI on FL performance and ELL can be

supported by the fact that learners with high levels of EI usually show high levels of self-control, emotional control (Siegling et al., 2014), and mental health (Zuanazzi et al., 2022). In addition, EI, as well as ELL, influences learners' overall well-being (Chen et al., 2021). Well-being is an effective factor in learners' mental health, optimism, self-esteem, satisfaction, and motivation (Kasap, 2021). EI also opens people's minds and helps them to evaluate situations realistically (Jiménez-Picón et al., 2021). In addition, EI influences learners' creativity (Zuanazzi et al., 2022). According to Lei & Lei (2022), creativity affects the process of SLA. It improves learners' flexibility in problem-solving, thinking, and reasoning.

The positive correlation between EI and ELL corroborates findings by Li (2020), who investigated the same relationship among Chinese FL learners and confirmed the crucial role of EI in improving learners' cognitive system, ELL, motivation, self-confidence, and FL language progress. The results of the studies of Chen et al. (2021) and Li & Xu (2019) also support the positive relationship between EI and ELL. According to these studies, improving learners' EI increases their self-control, optimism, and happiness and makes FLL an enjoyable experience. The contribution of EI to the overall performance of FL learners has been confirmed in several other studies. For example, Ebrahimi et al. (2018) showed that learners' writing performance increased after a training program to improve their EI. According to the study, since EI develops learners' self-awareness and assertiveness, it affects their writing progress. Another study by Manzouri & Movahed (2017) showed a positive correlation between Iranian learners' EI, performance, and self-assessed abilities. The results showed that EI correlated

positively with learners' language performance and self-perceived proficiency. The study suggests that teachers can use various classroom activities, including games, role-playing, and group discussions, to improve the emotional state of learners, alleviate their anxiety, and increase their WTC.

A second dimension stressed in the current work is boosting FL learners' WTC, one of the main goals in formal language education. Previous research has shown WTC to be positively related to several affective factors, including foreign language classroom anxiety, motivation, grit, and self-perceived communication competence (e.g. Bensalem, 2021; Dewaele, 2019). The role of learners' WTC in enhancing ELL is under-researched. Scholars have mainly focused on identifying the factors other than ELL that contribute to learners' WTC (e.g., Alavi & Esmaeilifard, 2021; Dastgoshadeh & Javanmardi, 2021; Dewaele, 2019). Therefore, the illustration of positive relationship between learners' WTC and their ELL adds to previous research findings in this area. Increased stress management skills are associated with higher WTC (e.g. Derakhshan et al., 2021) which can, in turn, make L2 learning an enjoyable experience. This finding is in line with results reported from learner populations in different setting such as Iranian FL learners (Khajavy et al., 2018), British FL learners (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018), Spanish FL learners (Dewaele, 2019) and Arab FL learners (Bensalem, 2021). These studies emphasized the role of teachers in increasing learners' WTC in FL. They identified the frequent use of FL in class (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018), creating a challenging but friendly classroom environment, and designing appropriate interactive class activities with some degree of autonomy, such as bringing up

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interesting topics for discussion, as useful strategies for reducing learners' anxiety and increasing their attention, WTC in L2 and ELL (Dewaele, 2019).

The finding of the study that self-disclosure is a noticeable predictor of enjoyment of language learning is also supported by the literature. The probable explanation for this result may be the fact that a successful FLL requires constant social interactions in FL inside and outside the classroom. Sharing personal information such as experiences and feelings in the classroom (Henry & Thorsen, 2021), especially when it is related to the topic of the course, may be effective in increasing learner's attention, motivation, and interest ((Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2020) and in developing a friendly class atmosphere. Therefore, such a friendly atmosphere can reduce learners' FLCA and encourage them to participate in classroom activities ((Henry & Thorsen, 2021). SD provides teachers with beneficial information about learners' characteristic features and actual needs (Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2020), which helps to apply effective strategies to make the FLL experience enjoyable for learners and help them to achieve better language performance. Therefore, the observed positive correlation between Iranian EFL learners' SD and their ELL seems logical.

There is little research on the relationship between FL learners' SD and their positive and negative emotions, a knowledge gap that makes cross-comparisons difficult and requires further studies. However, the findings reported by Jebbour (2021) regarding the effects of Moroccan FL learners' SD on their writing performance are consistent with the findings of the present study. He concluded that classroom activities such as asking students to share their personal feelings and

experiences, whether written or oral, have positive effects on improving their writing and speaking skills. Besides, SD helps students discover valuable things about the experiences of others in their lives or during their FLL times. This type of information provides learners with valuable clues to facilitate their FLL journey.

Reviewing related studies indicates a paucity of research on the fourth research question of the study as well. Therefore, no study was found that directly addresses this issue. However, the results are defensible. Generally, as was mentioned earlier, EI seems to play an important role in learners' affective system, WTC, and willingness to use SD in the classroom. Learners with higher levels of WTC have a better sense of achievement that can make learning a language enjoyable for them and if they remain reticent, their learning experience can become boring for them.

In contrast to the findings of the present study (i.e., the weak relationship between the EI of FL learners and their ELL), EI has been shown to strongly influences people's academic performance (e.g. Trigueros et al., 2020), cognitive system, self-control, reasoning, self-esteem, creativity, happiness, stress management ability, and WTC in L2. EI helps people understand, regulate, and effectively express themselves and their emotions (Petrides, 2009), leading to effective SD. Therefore, creating a classroom environment that boosts FL learners' EI, WTC in L2, and willingness to disclose themselves can improve their ELL and FL performance. However, measuring the fluctuations in FL learners' ELL based on the value of the combination of the predictor variables of this study, (i.e., learners EI, WTC in L2, and SD) needs to be further

verified through studies of varied learner populations in Iran and other countries

ELL is influenced by several factors, including psychological and social factors, gender, level of language proficiency (Li et al., 2020), EI (Chen et al., 2021), WTC in L2 (Khajavy et al., 2018), and SD (Henry & Thorsen, 2021). Among these contributing factors, the present study focused on EI, WTC in L2, and SD. To be more precise, this study made an attempt to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' EI, WTC in L2, and SD and their ELL.

Based on the findings of the study it can be claimed that EFL learners' EI, WTC in L2, and SD have significant positive effects on their ELL. Besides, the results showed that the combination of the predictor variables of the study (i.e., FL learners' EI, WTC in L2, and SD) can strongly predict the variance in their ELL. Moreover, while WTC in L2 and SD were significantly good at predicting the variance in ELL, EI was found to be a weak predictor.

The significance of this study lies not only in its contribution to filling the existing knowledge gap regarding the identification of the influential factors in learners' ELL but also in its implications for FL teachers, policymakers, and FL learners. One of the most striking implications is that by creating a non-threatening, pleasant, and challenging classroom atmosphere, teachers can improve learners' language performance and make the experience of FLL more enjoyable.

Given the role of EI in learners' overall well-being, motivation, emotion regulation, self-confidence, WTC in L2, SD, and language performance, developing practical programs

to improve various aspects of FL learners' EI is highly recommended to teachers and educational policymakers.

This study made an attempt to highlight the importance of improving learners' WTC in L2 in their FL progress and ELL. Therefore, teachers are recommended to use appropriate classroom activities, such as role-playing, pair work, and group discussion (Hashemi, 2019, p. 88), to encourage learners to use L2 as much as possible.

Since encouraging learners to participate in SD activities influence their ELL and FL skills, instructors are recommended to use proper strategies in this respect. For instance, according to Elahi Shirvan & Taherian (2020), teachers' SD can improve ELL by increasing learners' motivation and opening their minds. For example, when the teacher, as a non-native speaker of the English language, talks about his anxieties, self-doubts, or difficulties in his or her FLL time, can promote students' motivation and perseverance and relieve their anxiety about communicating in a non-native accent.

The final implication of this study is for FL learners. Second language learners are recommended to take serious actions to recognize and reduce barriers to their FL progress, especially FLCA, and to accelerate their FLL by improving their knowledge and skills to improve their ELL, WTC in L2 inside and outside the classroom, EI, and SD to make their language learning experience as enjoyable as possible. For example, according to Çetin & Kılıçkaya (2019), constant use of the L2 with native and non-native interlocutors strongly improves learners' FL proficiency and WTC in L2.

Considering the undeniable impact of positive emotions on the process of SLA, the significance of this study lies not only in

its contribution to filling the existing knowledge gap regarding the identification of the influential factors in learners' ELL but also in its implications for FL teachers, policymakers, and FL learners.One of the most striking implications is that by creating a non-threatening, pleasant, and challenging classroom atmosphere, teachers can improve learners' language performance and make the experience of FLL more enjoyable.

This study suffered from several limitations. First, self-report questionnaires were the only data collection tool used in this study. Although questionnaires proved to be one of the most effective instruments for measuring the variables of the present study (i.e., ELL, EI, WTC in L2, and SD) it is recommended that this tool be supplemented with other data collection instruments, such as interviews, to increase the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation of this study is related to the sampling method. Since many schools and language institutes were unwilling to give permission to distribute the questionnaire link among their students, the researcher was forced to use convenience sampling. Although this sampling method has many advantages, such as quick and wide access to large samples, it may also have disadvantages, such as sample bias and lack of diversity, which may affect the generalizability of the results.

Given the role of EI in learners' overall well-being, motivation, emotion regulation, self-confidence, WTC in L2, SD, and language performance, developing practical programs to improve various aspects of FL learners' EI is highly recommended to teachers and educational policymakers.

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Statements and Declarations

Data Availability Statement

All the data on our participants' willingness to communicate, their self-disclosure, emotional intelligence, and enjoyment of language learning, collected through electronic and printed questionnaires, are available but cannot be shared publicly due to privacy issues. They are, however, available on request from the corresponding author. The SPSS data file is accessible to the editorial office of the journal.

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