Unveiling the Power of Teacher Concern: Exploring EFL Institute Students' Perceptions and its Impact on Motivation, Anxiety, and Language Achievement

Saba Hasanzadeh (iD)
English Language and Literature Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. hasanzade.sabaa@gmail.com

Shaghayegh Shayesteh (Corresponding Author)
English Language and Literature Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. shayesteh@um.ac.ir

Reza Pishghadam
English Language and Literature Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. pishghadam@um.ac.ir

Elham Naji-Meidani
English Language and Literature Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. elhanaji@um.ac.ir

Abstract

The current qualitative study examined the role of teacher concern in Iranian institute English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' motivation and anxiety. The study involved 24 participants who participated in a focus group interview to express their opinions on this topic. Thematic analysis was applied to derive seven themes for each role of teacher concern - facilitator or debilitator - based on the perceptions of the students. The findings revealed that teacher concern can have both positive and negative effects on students' language learning process, depending on the circumstances. It can serve as a motivator, enhancing students' motivation, or as a hindrance, demotivating them. Teacher concern is shown to be a highly sensitive criterion, and teachers must be mindful of their students' characteristics and the level of care they demonstrate. Teacher concern is likened to a double-edged sword, capable of both motivating and demotivating students. This study emphasized the importance of understanding the impact of teacher concern on students' language learning and suggests that teachers should be cautious in their approach, taking into account individual student needs and providing appropriate levels of care and support.

Introduction

Motivation, anxiety, and language achievement are key factors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Numerous studies have explored the various factors that influence these variables, including learner characteristics, classroom environment, and instructional practices (Dörnyei, 2014; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). However, one important yet understudied factor is the role of teacher concern in shaping EFL students' motivation, anxiety, and language achievement.

Teacher concern refers to the extent to which teachers are genuinely interested in and attentive to their students' needs, progress, and well-being (Pianta, 1999). It encompasses aspects such as teacher-student relationships, teacher support, and teacher feedback. Previous research has shown that teacher concern can significantly impact students' academic outcomes and emotional well-being in mainstream education (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006). However, its influence on EFL learning outcomes remains relatively unexplored.

Understanding the role of teacher concern in EFL learning is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, EFL students often face unique challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited exposure to authentic English language contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). These challenges can result in lower motivation, higher anxiety levels, and lower language achievement if not adequately addressed. Secondly, EFL classrooms typically have a higher teacher-student ratio, making it challenging for teachers to provide individualized attention and support to each student (Liu, 2018). Thus, investigating the impact of teacher concern can provide insights into how teachers can create a positive and supportive learning environment for their EFL students.

This study aimed to examine EFL students' perceptions of the role of teacher concern in their motivation, anxiety, and language achievement. By understanding the impact of different dimensions of teacher concern, educators can effectively tailor their teaching approaches to enhance students' motivation, alleviate anxiety, and foster a conducive learning environment. Ultimately, this research aimed to promote more empathetic and student-centered teaching practices that can positively influence students' language learning outcomes.

Literature Review

In the field of EFL education, understanding the role of teachers in students' language learning processes has garnered significant attention. This literature review aims to explore the existing research on EFL students' perceptions of their teacher concern and its influence on their motivation, anxiety, and language achievement. By examining the available literature, this review will identify gaps in the research and propose potential areas for future investigation.

1. Teacher Concern and its Significance

Teacher concern refers to the extent to which teachers demonstrate care, empathy, and support for their students' academic and emotional well-being (Pianta, 1999). It plays a crucial role in creating a positive learning environment and fostering students' motivation and language achievement (Wentzel, 2002). Additionally, teacher concern has been found to reduce

students' anxiety levels, contributing to increased engagement and improved learning outcomes (Huang, 2012).

Pishghadam et al. (2022) introduced four types of concern. Apathetic teachers are indifferent and unconcerned about their students. They believe their only responsibility is to teach the material and lack emotional engagement with their learners. They neglect their students both inside and outside of the classroom. Sympathetic teachers offer verbal sympathy and compassion to their students, but do not take any action to help them (Pishghadam et al., 2022). They acknowledge their students' concerns and feelings to some extent but provide advice or judgment without actively assisting. Sympathetic teachers demonstrate passive concern, while empathetic teachers go beyond words and actively engage with their students' emotions and problems (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi 2023). They try to understand the situation from their students' perspective and take action to address the issues. Empathetic teachers provide companionship and support.

Metapathy goes even further, with teachers showing even greater concern than the students themselves. They go beyond the present situation and take steps they believe are best for their students (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2023), even if the students may not fully understand or appreciate their intentions (Pishghadam, 2022; Pishghadam et al., 2023). Transpathic teachers fully immerse themselves in their students' lives, feeling joy in their success and sadness in their failures. They may integrate their personal and professional lives, using their knowledge for teaching, monetization, or sharing their discoveries. Their high level of engagement often leads to academic achievements for their students and the spread of innovative ideas (Pishghadam et al., 2023).

2. Teacher Concern and Motivation

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between teacher concern and students' motivation in the EFL context (Chen & Tsai, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2009; Dörnyei, 2009; Park & Lee, 2019; Ushioda, 2011). Research suggests that when students perceive high levels of teacher concern, they experience increased intrinsic motivation, a sense of belonging, and a positive attitude towards learning (Wentzel, 2002; Huang, 2012). Conversely, low levels of teacher concern can lead to decreased motivation, disengagement, and a negative perception of the learning process (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

3. Teacher Concern and Anxiety

Anxiety is a prominent factor affecting EFL students' language learning experience (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Zhang, 2003). Teacher concern has been found to significantly influence students' anxiety levels. When students perceive high levels of teacher concern, they experience lower levels of anxiety, leading to increased self-confidence and willingness to take risks in their language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Conversely, a lack of teacher concern can contribute to heightened anxiety, inhibiting language acquisition and hindering overall achievement (Dörnyei, 2005).

4. Teacher Concern and Language Achievement

The impact of teacher concern on EFL students' language achievement has been widely studied. Research consistently indicates that students who perceive high levels of teacher

concern tend to achieve higher language proficiency levels (Bembenutty & White, 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wentzel, 2002; Wentzel et al., 2010). This positive relationship can be attributed to increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and improved engagement, all of which contribute to enhanced language learning outcomes (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dörnyei, 2005).

Although existing literature has shed light on the importance of teacher concern in EFL students' motivation, anxiety, and language achievement, there is still a need for further research in this area. Specifically, there is a lack of qualitative studies that explore EFL students' perceptions of teacher concern and its impact on their language learning experiences. By employing qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of students' perspectives and uncover nuanced insights that quantitative studies may overlook.

The existing literature highlights the significant role of teacher concern in EFL students' motivation, anxiety levels, and language achievement. Students who perceive high levels of teacher concern tend to experience increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and improved language proficiency. However, there is a research gap regarding qualitative investigations into EFL students' perceptions of teacher concern. Future research should focus on exploring students' perspectives through qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of teacher concern on their language learning experiences.

Method

1. Participants

Twenty-four Iranian EFL institute students participated in this study. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 28 which was considered as a mixture of young and later adulthood. Due to societal changes over the past few decades, young adulthood is now recognized as a separate stage of adulthood that is between adolescence and middle age. It is believed that young adults experience more psychological, cognitive, and emotional growth during this time, enabling the young adult to create an identity, take part in meaning-making, and become more independent (Higley, 2019).

Hence, since this is a very sensitive period and teachers can have a lot of emotional, psychological, or behavioral influences on these students, young adult learners were selected to participate in the current study. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from Gorgan, Iran.

2. Instrument

Focus group interview was employed in this study which refers to "a group comprised of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given issue or topic" (Anderson, 1990, 241). Focus group interviews help collect research participants' viewpoints in order to understand a particular problem (Khan & Manderson, 1992).

The researcher used the interview to elucidate EFL students' precise perceptions of the idea of teacher concern and its connection to their motivation, anxiety, and language achievement. It uncovered viewpoints, convictions, and attitudes about the issue that might not have been

extracted from merely responding to the questionnaires. It included four open-ended questions, based on the themes the researcher attempted to figure out, to promote conversation and further examination of certain topics or responses. The researcher asked participants if they had any concerns about taking notes of the discussion before starting the interview. Putting participants at ease, interviews were conducted in person at institutes.

3. Procedure

This study aimed to explore how EFL students' motivation, anxiety, and language achievement are triggered by their teacher concern. To achieve this objective, two focus group interviews were conducted, with a total of 24 students participating (12 students in each interview).

The interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable room within the school premises. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The discussions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes within the transcribed data. The analysis followed a systematic process, involving the creation of basic codes, identification of themes, evaluation of themes, definition of themes, and naming of themes. This process allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the data and ensured the reliability and validity of the findings.

The researchers, who were experienced in qualitative research methods, independently coded the transcribed data. Regular meetings were held to discuss and compare coding decisions, ensuring intercoder reliability. Any discrepancies were resolved through consensus and discussion.

Once the initial coding was completed, the researchers reviewed and refined the identified codes to identify overarching themes. The themes were evaluated based on their relevance, coherence, and significance to the research question. The researchers engaged in a thorough discussion to reach a consensus on the final themes.

The identified themes were then defined and named to accurately reflect their content and meaning. This step involved careful consideration of the data and the connections between the codes within each theme.

The procedure employed in this study allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the data, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. The thematic analysis approach provided a systematic and rigorous framework for analyzing the transcribed data and identifying key themes related to the influence of teacher concern on students' feelings and performance in class.

Results

After conducting the focus-group interviews, the transcriptions were thoroughly analyzed and it was revealed that teacher concern, in an EFL context, can be either facilitator or debilitator in different circumstances. The students had contrary views toward their teacher concern, some were fan of it and some were not. As the following table shows, 14 themes were extracted from the participants' perceptions, seven of which were facilitative and seven, debilitative.

Table 1. *Themes Related to the EFL Students' Perceptions of Teacher Concern*

Role	Theme	Definitions
Facilitator	1. Perseverance	Working and trying harder
	2. Empowerment	Feeling energetic and active
	3. Involvement	To fully participate and associate
	4.Acknowledgement	Feeling valuable and worthy of respect
	5. Secure	Feeling emotionally and mentally safe
	6.Language learning improvement	Getting better at language learning
	7. Motivation	Having the drive and reason to learn
Debilitator	1. Self-doubt	Lack of confidence in one self and one's abilities
	2. Getting carried away	To lose control of one's behaviors and getting proud
	3. Manipulation	Feeling of being overcontrolled or controlled unfairly
	4. Humiliation	Feeling ashamed and embarrassed
	5. Irritation	Feeling annoyed and discomfort
	6. Anxiety	Feeling of worry or fear
	7. Demotivation	Lack of interest and having no drive to learn

1. The Facilitator Role of TC

Students believed that their teacher kindness, care, and support mostly facilitate their learning process. A balanced teacher concern could make students experience positive emotions which resulted in better outcomes. They considered teacher concern as the feeling of responsibility that a teacher has towards his students and how much concerned he is about his students' psychological and emotional condition as well as their learning and academic success. In other words, they mostly believed that teacher concern is the empathy a teacher shows to the students. When a teacher tries to understand students and consider them not only as students but as human beings that need help to grow, positive emotions and positive teacher-student relationships can be established in the classroom. Positive emotions and positive effects experienced and perceived by the students are put into different themes which are discussed in the following sections.

1.1 Perseverance

It was found out of some participants' perceptions that the more they saw their teacher had a concern about them, the more they got encouraged to study and work harder. In other words, teacher concern made them spend more time studying and practicing the lessons to get better grades because this concern made them feel that their teacher has some expectations that need to be met. Therefore, they put more effort to see their teachers' satisfaction.

> *One of the most effective aspects of teacher concern was the one in which she told me that she didn't expect me to get that bad grade! That was somehow a spark in my mind to try harder and put in much more time so that I can get better grades in the following exams.*

1.2 Empowerment

Some students also had this idea that their mood in class could change based on their teacher concern. While their teacher showed them how much their problems, emotions, improvements, and efforts were important to her, students got energy throughout this vibe their teacher was

spreading in class even in a time of exhaustion, sickness, and difficulties. Therefore, the way their teacher cared about their goodness and the way he could show it to them could boost students' energy and lead them to be active during the classroom even if they were not in a good mood that day, just as the participant mentioned:

> *A positive vibe brings a positive vibe, I guess. My teacher is always worried about how much I progress or which lesson parts I find difficult to grasp and whenever we have any problem, she is available for listening to us. This is such a great vibe that a teacher can give to her students that she really does care about us! I guess the least we can do to thank and value this teacher behavior is to be active in the classroom and to really show how much energy we get from the way we see she devotes her time, kindness, and energy.*

1.3 Involvement

Also, some participants believed that teacher concern could positively affect their willingness to participate and get involved in the classroom. It actually made them take action and have active participation. Similar to the previous part, students tried to be more attentive, alert, active, and prepared because they did not want to disappoint their teacher in a way that they are not worth caring about. As the participant stated:

> *Since I am a little shy, my teacher's behavior really determines how much I am going to take part in class discussions. The way she treated and valued me and my well-being made me one of her active students who was often ready to answer her questions in class.*

1.4 Acknowledgement

It was shown that when teachers had caring behaviors and explicitly showed sympathy and empathy, the students liked the way that they were acknowledged by their teachers. The students felt that they are important and respected while seeing how seriously their teacher cares about their achievements and future.

> *Well, it made me feel important and respected to see that my teacher has concern about my studies and she doesn't just write something on the board and then leave the class. The fact that she spends extra time to talk with us, to know about our lives, and to give us solutions if we are facing any problem, is so rare and precious.*

1.5 Secure

It was found that one of the feelings teacher concerns could create in students was a feeling of being secured. Students could get affected psychologically, mentally, and emotionally by the way their teacher treated them. Some of the students mentioned that how their teacher empathized with them and understands them relieving them mentally and putting them at ease. In other words, teacher care could reduce psychological barriers that students may have experienced in the learning process and the classroom. As one of the participants said:

> *Personally, my teacher caring behaviors help me get mentally ready for the class. Because the teacher can make a supportive classroom by showing how much she cares about our feelings, problems, and studies. So, I will not be afraid to make mistakes since I know I won't be judged and whatever she says is for me to get better.*

1.6 Language Learning Improvement

Some students believed that teacher concern has a direct influence on their language achievement since it leads to more motivation and participation and better emotions in the classroom. Increasing enthusiasm for studying, the tendency to participate in class, and a safe and supportive atmosphere are all some of the effects of having a caring teacher which result in the students' language learning improvement. However, some students stated that teacher behavior is not the only criterion for progress. It can surely affect our learning process in a good way and lead us to better outcomes, but the students' inner motivation, willingness to participate and communicate, efforts, and their individual characteristics are also important factors in determining their success in language learning (Sadeghi Ordoubadi et al., 2023).

> *The behavior and attitude of the teacher directly affect the students' achievements. Teacher care can encourage students to study more and progress in their language proficiency. Personally, my speaking improved a lot more than it used to before knowing my current teacher. She really helped me as much as she could.*

1.7. Motivation

As the last facilitative effect of teacher concern in this study, motivation was one of the most things that the students experienced perceiving their teacher concern. Having the desire and the reason to study and practice to learn a foreign language is one of the most important prerequisites in the language learning context. Most of the students believed that the teachers' care plays a significant role in increasing their motivation since it creates such a good feeling and emotions in students. As one of the participants mentioned:

> *I truly loved my teacher and the fact that she was always worried about us. She used to talk with us in her free time about how we can go through each obstacle of life and how easy is to achieve our goals. She made me love the English language more than ever.*

2. The Debilitator Role of TC

Although some of the students viewed teacher concern as a beneficial and positive characteristic, some believed that it is a very sensitive criterion that can easily lead to negative emotions if teachers do not pay attention to the amount of concern or care they express. Some students mentioned that teachers should not consider their strictness as concern. They are supposed to show the concern they have for their students with kindness and courtesy if they want to see their students' progress, otherwise, it only leads to establishing negative emotions in the students, resulting in negative teacher-student relationships. They believed that teachers with too much concern are too anxious about their students' success and future wellbeing which ends up in having nervous students as well, since students can perceive this anxiety and worry

from the teachers' behaviors and actions and can get affected unconsciously. Anxiety is only one of the negative emotions that too much concern can cause in students, hence teachers should know how sensitive this matter is, since too much concern might be taken as controlling behavior, strictness, or acting bossy that more likely hinders the students' learning progress. Negative emotions and negative effects experienced and perceived by the EFL students are put into different themes which are discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Self-doubt

Sometimes teachers are worried about students' learning status and wellbeing but they do not apply a good way to express it. Students mentioned that when teachers show their concern toward them through blaming, anger and strictness, their self-confidence decreases instead of getting boosted and it destroys teacher-student relationship, as a result. For example, one of the participants stated:

> *There was a time when my teacher always blamed me because I did not have that much participation during the class but my exam scores were ok. This behavior caused me a lot of negativity and gradually I lost my confidence in my learning. A very bad feeling that maybe something is wrong with me came to me and my scores descended one after another. The reason was actually that my teacher did not want to understand individual differences and he forced us to behave in a way he desired and thought is the best for us. I could not take part in class discussions a lot because I was a shy and introverted person. He was definitely wrong because he thought he cared about me by blaming me and questioning my social abilities. So, I believe being able to make good relationships with students and getting to know them are more important than being concerned about them.*

2.2. Getting Carried Away

Sometimes too much concern with kindness can fall you from the other edge. Paying too much attention to students, supporting them anytime and anywhere, and having too much concern about their future and lives might make students feel that they are too important and this is their teachers' duty to fully devote themselves which results in students losing control of their behaviors, getting proud and carried away and not focusing on their learning anymore. As one of the participants mentioned:

> *The amount of teacher concern we receive has to be not too much or too less and not with strictness and too much kindness. In my opinion, human beings sometimes take the kindness they receive in the wrong direction and think that they are allowed to abuse it. I have seen that while students see their teacher as so caring and supportive and always follows their progress, they participate in class less than they used to do.*

2.3 Manipulation

One of the reasons why teacher concern could be complicated and sensitive is that it might lead to teachers having controlling language over students. Students usually show negative

reactions to this type of behavior, especially those at the age of puberty or teenage ones, because they do not fancy being controlled and they cannot tolerate bossy behaviors, either from their parents or their teachers. So, how teachers express their concern is the most important thing. The best way to do so is to control their concern and have a balanced caring behavior towards their students since too much concern can be dangerous and destructive.

> *While students feel that they are being controlled and manipulated, progress cannot be achieved in learning. Teachers should not limit students' willingness to perform a task the way they want. Students know how they learn best and succeed. I myself never experienced a positive outcome in a class in which I had to meet all of my teacher's high and tough expectations of me.*

2.4 Humiliation

Another negative emotion that students experienced throughout their teacher concern was the feeling of humiliation. Teachers should mostly care about students' feelings and what emotions a specific behavior can produce in class. Sometimes teachers decide to act roughly for the students' sake since they think strictness led the students to become alert and focused on their learning process. However, they might receive the opposite feedback from the students. For instance, a teacher who punishes or blames students for getting bad grades in front of the whole class will not only make negative emotions like humiliation in students but will also decrease their interest in that class. As the participant stated:

> *I remember once my teacher talked about my condition to my parents because she thought she had the right to talk badly about me. Maybe it came out of her concern and she thought this is for me getting better. However, she just embarrassed me in front of my family. She could first come to me and speak to me about my problems and difficulties. She had better ask me about the reasons behind my low grades and helped me to solve the problems I was facing. That teacher made me less interested than ever to attend her class because she was doing things the way she thought was right and never asked for our ideas and the fact that we did not want that kind of concern which turns to hurt our feelings.*

2.5 Irritation

Among all the negative emotions that teacher concern can trigger, being irritated was one of the most commonly experienced feelings for students. In students' opinion, when someone is worried about their lives more than they do themselves bothers them a lot. Teachers having too much concern make students uncomfortable and annoyed in some ways because students believe that no one knows what is best for them except themselves. Hence, they find this concern their teacher has towards them unnecessary and excessive which irritates them, as the participant directly mentioned:

> *The more a teacher showed concern about my future, the more exhausted and irritated I became. Of course, I love kind and caring teachers, nevertheless, the teacher who cares too much, transfer their anxiety to me and make me feel uncomfortable.*

2.6 Anxiety

Although some students said that teacher concern reduces their tension and relieves them mentally and psychologically, some believed that it increases their anxiety and makes them nervous. Teachers send their own anxiety to the students unconsciously by being too much worried about how well students are making progress to achieve their goals. Teachers' behaviors and emotions directly or indirectly can shape students' emotions, as one of the participants said:

> *Without any doubt, we get affected by the teachers' attitudes and actions. Teachers having positive affections can establish positive emotions in us and the same is true for the negative affections. If they feel tired or angry, we will get bored and exhausted during the session. If they are anxious, we will definitely understand and feel the same.*

> *If the teacher keeps on insisting that I can do better or I have to do something because I have the potential and he or she can only see it, I will get anxious. Because in that case, I would be afraid that I may not be able to meet their expectations and the fear of failure will make it hard for me to learn.*

2.7. Demotivation

Despite the fact that the majority of the students considered the positive effect of teacher concern on their motivation and language achievement, some still mentioned how it led to losing their passion for language learning. It is worth noting that almost all of the students believed that a balanced and enough care or concern more likely causes positive emotions leading to having more motivated students. However, too much teacher concern shows the opposite side of it and more likely produces negative emotions leading to having more demotivated students in class.

> *I believe that the motivation we have in learning English generally comes from our inner selves but we cannot neglect the effect of teachers' behaviors on our motivations. The way teachers treat us, value us, and care about us has an undeniable influence on our advancement. When it comes to teacher concern, caring and worrying more than is needed sometimes result in students' demotivation. There is no need to put so much pressure on students in order to see them succeed. Because this is not only unsupportive but also destroys students' desire for learning.*

Discussion

The contrasting views expressed by the students regarding their teacher concern highlighted the complex nature of this phenomenon. Some students embraced and appreciated their teacher concern, considering it as a positive influence on their learning experience. On the other hand, some students did not find the teacher's concern beneficial and, in fact, perceived it as a hindrance to their progress. This finding aligned with existing literature on the importance of teacher support and involvement in students' learning. Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of teacher concern on student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (e.g., Pianta et al., 2003; Wentzel, 2002).

According to Pianta et al. (2003), when teachers show genuine care and concern for their students, it fosters a positive teacher-student relationship, which in turn enhances students' academic and social outcomes. Students who feel supported by their teachers are more likely to feel safe, valued, and motivated to learn. On the other hand, the finding that some students did not find the teacher's concern beneficial and perceived it as a hindrance to their progress is also consistent with existing literature. Some studies have highlighted the potential negative effects of over-involvement or excessive teacher control on students' autonomy and self-efficacy (e.g., Skinner et al., 2008; Reeve et al., 2004). Skinner et al. (2008) argues that while teacher support is important, it should be balanced with promoting students' independence and autonomy. When teachers excessively intervene or provide too much guidance, it may hinder students' ability to develop their problem-solving skills and self-regulation.

The extracted themes related to the facilitative role of the teacher concern highlighted the importance of teacher concern in fostering student engagement, motivation, and self-confidence. In the same vein, Xie and Derakhshan (2019) found that teacher concern positively influenced students' motivation and reduced their anxiety levels. Students perceived their teacher's concern as a form of support and encouragement, which enhanced their engagement and motivation in the language learning process.

Similarly, another study by Wang and Derakhshan (2020) also highlighted the positive effects of teacher concern on EFL students' motivation. Students reported feeling valued and cared for, which fostered a positive learning environment and increased their intrinsic motivation to learn the language.

Interestingly, themes related to the debilitative role of the teacher concern suggested situations where teacher concern might have unintended negative consequences. These debilitative themes encompass self-doubt, getting carried away, manipulation, humiliation, irritation, anxiety, and demotivation. These themes shed light on the potential pitfalls of teacher concern, such as unintentional pressure, over-involvement, or controlling behaviors, which can lead to adverse effects on students' mental well-being and motivation. Likewise, Liu and Hu (2018) found that some students perceived excessive teacher concern as overbearing and controlling, leading to a decrease in their motivation. These students felt that the teacher's constant monitoring and intervention hindered their autonomy and independence in the learning process.

Moreover, a study by Derakhshan and Xie (2018) revealed that teacher concern could also increase students' anxiety levels. Some students felt pressured to meet the teacher's expectations, which led to heightened anxiety and fear of failure.

Further, Perseverance emerged as a facilitative theme, indicating that when teachers show concern for their students, it can foster a sense of resilience and determination in them. This aligns with previous research that has highlighted the importance of teacher support in promoting academic persistence (Li & Lerner, 2013). Empowerment is another facilitative theme, suggesting that teacher concern can empower students by providing them with a sense of agency and control over their learning (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). This finding is consistent with the self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy support from teachers can enhance students' motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Involvement and acknowledgement are facilitative themes that highlight the significance of teacher concern in creating a supportive classroom environment. When teachers are actively involved in their students' learning process and provide recognition for their efforts, it can enhance students' self-esteem and sense of belonging (Wentzel, 1997). Security emerged as a facilitative theme, indicating that teacher concern can create a safe and supportive atmosphere for students to take risks and express their thoughts and opinions. This finding aligns with research on the role of teacher-student relationships in promoting a positive classroom climate (Roorda et al., 2011).

Language learning improvement and motivation are facilitative themes that emphasize the positive impact of teacher concern on students' language learning outcomes. When teachers demonstrate genuine care and interest in their students' language development, it can enhance their motivation and engagement in the learning process (Dörnyei, 2001). This finding underscores the importance of a supportive teacher-student relationship in promoting language learning success.

On the other hand, the identification of seven debilitative themes highlights the potential negative consequences of teacher concern. Self-doubt emerged as a debilitative theme, suggesting that excessive teacher concern may lead students to doubt their own abilities and rely excessively on external validation. This finding is consistent with the concept of learned helplessness, which suggests that excessive support and intervention from teachers can undermine students' sense of competence (Meece et al., 2006).

Getting carried away and manipulation are debilitative themes that highlight the potential pitfalls of over-involvement and controlling behaviors by teachers. When teachers become overly concerned and try to control every aspect of students' learning, it can hinder their autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Humiliation and irritation emerged as debilitative themes, suggesting that teacher concern, when expressed inappropriately or insensitively, can have detrimental effects on students' self-esteem and emotional well-being. This finding highlights the importance of empathy and sensitivity in teacher-student interactions (Pianta et al., 2007).

Anxiety and demotivation are debilitative themes that indicate the potential negative impact of teacher concern on students' mental well-being and motivation. Excessive concern or pressure from teachers can create a stressful learning environment, leading to increased anxiety and reduced motivation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This finding emphasizes the need for teachers to strike a balance between showing care and support while also promoting autonomy and self-regulation in students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study can provide valuable insights into the facilitative and debilitative roles of teacher concern. The identification of facilitative themes underscores the positive implications of teacher concern for students' learning, motivation, and overall experience. However, the presence of debilitative themes highlights the potential negative consequences of excessive or inappropriate teacher concern. These findings emphasize the importance of

teachers being mindful of their expressions of concern and maintaining a balance between support and autonomy promotion in their interactions with students.

The findings of this study underscored the importance of considering individual differences and contextual factors when examining the impact of teacher concern on students in an EFL setting. What may be beneficial and motivating for one student may not have the same effect on another. Teachers should be aware of the diversity of student perceptions and tailor their approach accordingly, ensuring that their concern is perceived positively and does not inadvertently hinder students' progress.

These findings have important implications for both EFL teachers and teacher education programs. EFL teachers need to reflect on their teaching practices and be conscious of the boundaries between showing concern and potentially becoming overbearing. It is crucial for teachers to strike a balance that supports student engagement and motivation, while respecting individual autonomy and minimizing negative outcomes.

For teacher education programs, these findings highlight the need to address the complexities of teacher concern in EFL contexts. Providing future teachers with the skills and knowledge to navigate the fine line between facilitation and debilitation is essential. Teachers should be equipped with strategies to understand and respond to individual student needs, foster a supportive learning environment, and promote positive student-teacher relationships that enhance learning outcomes.

It is important to note that this study focused on a specific EFL context and the findings may not be directly applicable to other educational settings. Future research should focus on investigating the impact of teacher concern in various settings and with a larger sample size to improve the applicability of the results.

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Appendix

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Would you define teacher concern, student motivation, and anxiety? How are they related?
2. As an EFL student, what kinds of emotions (positive and negative) have you experienced during your learning process that were resulted from your teacher behavior?
3. To what extent, do you think your language achievement can be linked to your teacher concern?
4. What are the influences of teacher concern (positive, negative) on your EFL motivation and anxiety specifically?