

Exploring the Interrelationship Among Emotional Intelligence, Achievement Goals, Cultural Identity, and Self-Actualization on L2 Proficiency: A Path Analysis of Iranian EFL Learners

Reza Taherkhani^{a*}, and Hashem Sharafi^b

^a Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

^b Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

*Corresponding author: r.taherkhani@basu.ac.ir

Article information	
Abstract	In second language learning, it is essential to unearth the significance of the potential relationship among emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, self-actualization and their possible impacts on L2 proficiency. The interrelationship among emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 language proficiency in Iranian EFL learners was, therefore, investigated for the first time in an Iranian context. The participants were 319 B.A. EFL learners, consisting of 223 female and 96 male learners aged 18 to 35, chosen via convenience sampling. An explanatory correlational survey study aimed at exploring the relationship, using four researcher-designed questionnaires, and learners' GPAs in three English general courses. The data revealed positive correlations between emotional intelligence, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 proficiency, where emotional intelligence was the dominant predictive factor. Achievement goals were found to be no predictors for L2 proficiency. The data support L2 educational methods that place equal emphasis on emotional, cultural, and linguistic development.
Keywords	Emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, self-actualization, L2 proficiency
APA citation:	Taherkhani, R. & Sharafi, H. (2026). Exploring the interrelationship among emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, and self-actualization on L2 proficiency: A path analysis of Iranian EFL learners. <i>PASAA</i> , 74, 192–221.

1. Introduction

The value of learning a second language (L2) has driven many scholars and teachers to consider various aspects that influence L2 learning (Zhang et al., 2020). Contrary to traditional viewpoints, whereby L2 learning has been essentially linked to linguistic skills, new viewpoints have shown an understanding of the increasing value of social aspects, culture, and emotions that influence the L2 learner concerning the level of L2 proficiency that the individual possesses (de Bot et al., 2007). The understanding of the characteristics of the learner with regard to emotions, social aspects, and cognitive processes has become essential for improving teaching practices (Brown, 2014).

Learning an additional language, specifically in an EFL context, is an enormously complex process which is influenced by a multitude of social, cognitive, affective, and metacognitive factors. The roles of affective factors, consisting of the students' sentiments and emotions, have been highlighted to assume pivotal roles in the aspects of teaching and learning outcomes (Khaleghi, 2016). Such variables can either boost or impede the process of learning, depending on the emotional setting during the learning process (Zayed & Al-Ghamdi, 2019). The facilitation or obstruction during learning can occur through positive and negative emotions, respectively, that prevent learning by forming learning barriers (Farzan, 2015).

Recent years have witnessed rising interest in the participation of individual difference components, such as personality characteristics, cultural identity, and self-actualization, in L2 learning (Larsen Freeman, 2015). However, little research has focused on the relationship that emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, and self-actualization have to Iranian EFL learners' language achievement. The increasing interest in its study does not seem sufficient to lead to a comprehensive investigation that explores its perspective and implications for language learning achievement (Desta, 2019).

The current study seeks to fill some of this existing gap by researching the linkages that do exist in relation to emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 proficiency. It is hoped that by investigating the variables that have been chosen and remain largely unexplored until now within the context of L2 acquisition, more can be learned of this complex process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emotional Intelligence (EI)

As the years have progressed, the concept of EI has been refined from its original general definitions of social intelligence, as identified by Thorndike (1920), to a more complex area of study, with much empirical research supporting the theory. In particular, many of Salovey and Mayer's (1990) comments on EI were supported by research concerning the capacity of an individual to interpret, comprehend, manage, and regulate emotions in themselves and others. Salovey and Mayer also outlined five major areas of EI: identifying and defining one's own emotions, managing one's own emotions, self-motivation, the ability to empathize with others, and the ability to manage one's own relationships with others.

Numerous studies have supported this developmental trajectory of EI theory. For instance, Chen and Zhang (2020) determined that the degree to which EFL student learners possess the trait of emotional intelligence substantially influences both their oral and written comprehension capabilities in their English language learning process. Thus, it was validated that the items within the construct of emotional intelligence, including welfare and self-control, have a significant influence on the language learning process. Li (2019) explored the influence of emotional intelligence on foreign language enjoyment (FLE) as well as on language learning outcomes. The findings also indicated that FLE serves as a mediator between emotional intelligence and academic achievement and, therefore, provided evidence that the theoretical framework articulated above has validity. Furthermore, the results of the systematic review of 15 studies conducted by Javaid et al. (2024) provide insight into the positive influence that emotional intelligence and self-concept have on student academic achievement.

Goleman illustrated the importance of EI in the workplace through an expanded framework (1995). He defined a model encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation,

motivation, empathy, and social skills. Each component plays an important part in leadership and developing relationships as a manager or leader. The research carried out by Pope et al. (2012) confirms the significance of EI in influencing academic and work-related outcomes.

In the Iranian setting, more recent research has emphasized the role of EI in language learning. Soodmand Afshar & Karbakhsh Ravari's 2017 research established positive correlations between EI and L2 proficiency in Iranian EFL learners, as proposed in the theoretical framework that suggested the role of EI in improving language proficiency. The role of EI in improving the speaking proficiency of advanced learners was confirmed by Esmaeeli et al. in 2018 via the establishment of a positive relationship between the two factors. Taheri et al. confirmed these findings in 2019 by establishing links between EI and various strategies used in language learning. Informed by these various findings on the significance of EI in interpersonal effectiveness and academics, it can be seen that the significance of EI in both personal and academic developments supports various theories.

2.2 Achievement Goals (AG)

Achievement Goals Theory is a well-established model for examining and interpreting those aspects that motivate learners' behavior and its outcomes within a context of acquisition. The theory emerged as a concept in 1988 and suggests that people with different dispositions have two methods to attain success within a learning task. The first one relates to a learning goal and involves those actions that are focused on acquiring new skills within a learner. The other issue relates to a performance goal and represents those actions that are designed to succeed better in comparison to others.

The role of academic goals in learning processes can have a significantly positive and negative impact on academic achievements (Feng & Li, 2024). In support of this claim, different studies within this theoretical foundation have revealed different roles of academic goals in academic achievements. Chen and Wong (2014), for example, demonstrated that a non-significant relation exists between mastery goals and academic achievements for Chinese college students. This is an indicator that different efficacies can occur in academic goals. Within this context, Dweck (1986) revealed that academic goals play a directive role in regulating learners' behavior through different intentions between learners' learning process and academic success.

Theoretical development continues to accept that in a more advanced theory, goals are complex and are inclusive in systems that encompass attributions, beliefs, and emotions. The proposals in this theory were demonstrated in a study related to this concept conducted by Nicholls in 1984 and in a study conducted by Maehr and Nicholls in 1980. In this theoretical development, goals are believed to encompass a wide array of cognitions and emotions that affect the states and behaviors of learners.

Empirical research demonstrates how various types of achievement goals affect academic outcomes. For instance, Ng'ang'a et al. (2018) showed that several scales measuring goal-setting and academic success were positively correlated among Kenyan students. In addition, the research by Shyr et al. (2017) found that students' strategies to learn English as a foreign language were influenced by the extent to which students had mastery versus performance-approach goals.

Church et al. (2001) discovered that mastery-oriented students were more likely to participate than those who were performance oriented toward their assessments, and

performance oriented students showed lower levels of participation than those who were mastery oriented. These differences illustrate some of the ways the different types of achievement goals can influence different dimensions of behaviour and self-motivation within the classroom. Moreover, Elliot (1999) suggested that mastery goals related to deep analysis and involvement, whereas performance-avoidance goals related to shallow involvement.

In the Iranian EFL context, a study by Mohammadi Ghavam et al. (2011) revealed that mastery goals significantly affect cognition and metacognition strategy use. According to Moghimi (2020), the dominant mastery goal of Iranian EFL learners was related to a deeper learning approach. The significance of goal orientation on the impact on the educational experience and success has been highlighted in this research.

In summary, the theoretical framework for achievement goals, with its solid empirical foundation, offers a comprehensive perspective on the role of goals in education. The theoretical model lays out how to achieve improved academic success through goal orientation with a variety of strategies.

2.3 Cultural Identity (CI)

Cultural identity is a multifaceted notion that encompasses how individuals view themselves through various societal structures, including race, gender, and ethnicity (Urrieta, 2010). According to Ma et al. (2024), when it comes to language education, knowing what role cultural identity plays in people learning EFL is of great importance. Cultural identity has been viewed as something created externally by other people, positioning the person, or internally through the way they position themselves within society. It is a paradigm that evolved in order to better understand the workings of identity, embracing the dynamic, experiential, and cultural nature of identity, developed over time (Hall, 1996). The perception of identity, as identified by Hall (1996) as a personal and collective self-concept that contains history and culture, is the predominant paradigm upon which the use of cultural identity for second language acquisition is conceptualized.

This emerging view on cultural identity also finds backing. For example, Rust (2008) focused on the impacts of biculturalism, cultural identity, and academic success on African American adolescents. The study indicated a positive link between cultural identity and self-esteem, with the latter being associated with academic success. The identification of this link between cultural identity and other concepts is a clear indication of the importance of cultural identity to educational success, given that self-esteem, labelled with cultural identity, holds the potential for fostering success.

To offer additional support for the relevance of this perspective, the study of Peng & Patterson (2021) explored the links between cultural identity, motives, and English proficiency among international learners within the United States. Their findings suggested that components of American identity were not associated with English proficiency, while components of ethnic identity showed a negative association. This suggests that aspects of cultural identity unrelated to language capacity development may still exert an influence.

Hall (1990) suggested two definitions of cultural identity: one as a collective, shared phenomenon among members of the community and the other as an individual, dynamic construct constructed in and through experience and cultural contacts. The same conceptions are also seen in current research. Azimzadeh Khoravi and Bemani Naeini (2020), for example, noted strong positive correlations between cultural identity and L2 speaking ability for Iranian

EFL learners. Their research is in Hall's (1990) belief that cultural identity as an emergent concept has a core position in language learning since it regulates the performance and participation of learners.

As Chang (2010) shows in his study of Korean EFL students, cultural identity is an important factor in language learning, especially when learners are part of a globalized world. This view has been supported by the findings of Taherkhani and Karbakhsh-Ravari (2018). Their research demonstrates a significant correlation between learner autonomy and cultural identity, as well as learner autonomy and L2 success. Therefore, autonomy was considered to be a more accurate predictor of L2 success, while the interdependence between autonomy and cultural identity is critical to developing competency in the target language.

Despite the above evidence, cultural identity and language competence are not positively linked. According to Lieb (2019), who looked at Japanese learners of English, there was no connection between their sociocultural identity and their proficiency in the English language. Therefore, it may be reasonable to conclude that the impact of cultural identity on language learning varies based on individual and structural factors. Mohammadi and Izadpanah (2019) also found negative correlations between a learner's sociocultural identity and proficiency in EFL; like Lieb, they concluded that the effects of cultural identity may be complicated and varying based on the context.

Rashidi and Mansurian (2015) found that identity constructs were not directly related to language achievement in the Iranian context. The results revealed that the impact of cultural identity on language acquisition was conditional on specific circumstances regarding the relationship between culture and education in Iran. However, Mirahmadi Kia et al. (2021) discovered, via a structural equation modeling, that identity is positively correlated with language proficiency, thus establishing the role of identity in language achievement.

The work on the theoretical model of cultural identity will concentrate on the continually developing process of cultural identity. This model will consider how the process of developing a cultural identity overlaps with the process of language acquisition that exists simultaneously. The research that supports the idea of cultural identity having an influence on the ability to acquire languages has shown that while there is an empirical link between how one's cultural identity develops and the ability to acquire languages, the specific amount and type of influence can vary from context to context. The implications of this research for educators and curriculum developers are clear: including cultural identity in the design of effective language acquisition programs is essential for supporting learners in blending their cultural and linguistic components.

2.4 Self-actualization

Self-actualization as a multidimensional phenomenon (Hoher et al. 2024) was first introduced by Kurt Goldstein in 1939. It provides a critical lens for understanding human motivation and potential. Goldstein (1939) further concluded that self-actualization is an ongoing process, and people always continue to reach their potential. In addition, Carl Rogers expanded on Goldstein's ideas when he incorporated self-actualization as part of an individual's development as a person and how a person views themselves. According to Rogers (1951), self-actualization is continually achieved by interpreting one's experiences to continue to build and support one's self-concept. Further, Rogers (1961) stated that the development of a congruence of one's ideal self with one's actual experiences will increase both autonomy and

personal satisfaction. Accordingly, Rogers conceptualizes self-actualization as a gradual and fluid process rather than an endpoint of development.

Rogers' theory is supported by empirical findings. For example, Ordun and Akun (2017) explored the connections among emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-actualization in Turkish EFL learners. This research showed a strong positive relationship between EI and self-actualization, which demonstrates how self-actualization enhances self-efficacy. This also indicates that self-actualization is an essential psychological resource for academic and personal success.

Likewise, Eswari (2017) performed an ethnographic study of Indian undergraduate students, showing that positive academic achievement is associated with self-actualization. Furthermore, it supports the belief that the attainment of self-actualization increases academic performance in educational settings. In the same way, the positive relationship with academic performance is also proven by Davidson et al. (2007), who identified a high correlation with a different orientation to achievement concerning self-actualization among university students.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a pivotal theory in humanistic psychology that generally incorporates self-actualization within a motivational structure. Maslow (1943) considered self-actualization to be the highest level of psychological development, which can only be achieved when basic needs are met, such as physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness, and self-esteem. Maslow (1968) framed self-actualization as a growth need, a type of motivation focused on realizing potential, which is growth-oriented rather than deficiency-oriented. This is supported by Vaughn et al. (2009), who also found a strong relationship between self-actualization and ethnic identity.

An empirical test of the theory on self-actualization has also been performed by Pausanos (2014). Pausanos's (2014) empirical study on the relationship between EI and self-actualization among the elderly in Tagbilaran, Bohol, confirmed a positive relationship between high EI and high self-actualization. Kumar et al. (2020) pushed the boundaries further with a research study related to the impact of self-actualization on job performance. Their cross-sectional research on Pakistani employees revealed a positive association between self-actualization and both routine and creative job performance. The research indicates that self-actualization is considerably important for improving work-related outcomes within an organization. For instance, Shirzad Moghadam and Ghapanchi (2018) discovered that there is a positive relationship between self-actualization of EFL students and their levels of intelligence, specifically related to linguistic intelligence. The relationship of self-actualization with EFL students is important in an educational context as it pertains to the students' language acquisition and proficiency.

In summary, the theoretical perspective on self-actualization has vast evidence from empirical studies, which indicate how self-actualization plays a critical role in an individual's educational and developmental processes. A better understanding of how self-actualization impacts L2 learning will inform the development of more effective pedagogical practices to enhance learner outcomes. The study seeks to identify relationships between emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, and self-actualization as predictors of L2 proficiency among Iranian EFL learners.

2.5 Theoretical Framework for the SEM Model

The hypothesized model (Figure 1) has been developed by integrating principles from Educational Psychology and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). More specifically, the foundational theoretical perspective for this model is Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) of language development (de Bot et al., 2007). This perspective holds that language proficiency results from a dynamic interaction of cognitive, emotional, and social subsystems through a complex, nonlinear process. Within the DST framework above, the constructs of the proposed model are framed according to principles of established theories. Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined according to Goleman's (1995) model of self-awareness and self-regulation; Achievement Goals (AG) according to Elliot and McGregor's 2x2 achievement goal theory (2001); Cultural Identity (CI) according to Hall's (1990, 1996) socio-cultural perspective on identity as dynamic and context-dependent; and Self-Actualization (SA) according to Maslow's (1968) and Rogers's (1961) definition of self-actualization as a process of becoming one's best potential.

The proposed SEM model suggests that L2 proficiency is jointly created through the interaction of these three emotional and social cognitive variables. It is proposed that emotional intelligence provides a strong foundation for developing clarity of cultural identity and self-actualization, and that all three variables will positively correlate with L2 proficiency. It is proposed that achievement goals are motivational influences that can support the positive development of clarity of CI, SA, and ultimately L2 proficiency.

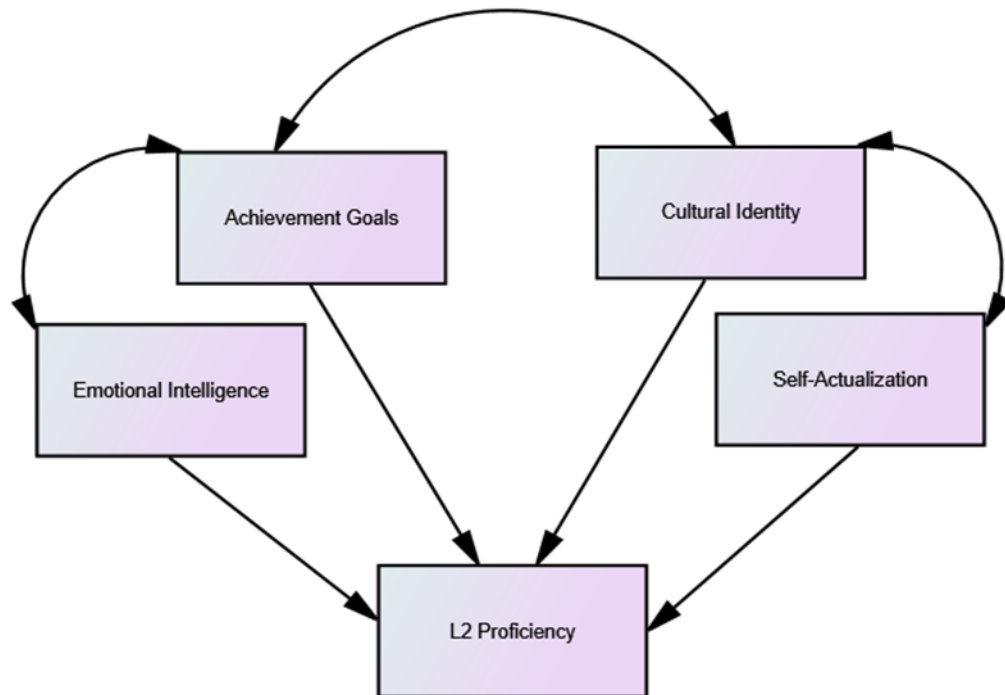
The current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' emotional intelligence and their L2 proficiency?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' achievement goal and their L2 proficiency?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity and their L2 proficiency?
4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-actualization and their L2 proficiency?
5. What is a theoretically consistent and empirically well-fitting structural model depicting the interrelationships among emotional intelligence, achievement goal, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 proficiency in Iranian EFL learners' language learning context?

Drawing from the reviewed literature, a theoretical conceptual model (Figure 1) has been proposed to address the second research question. This model was developed utilizing IBM SPSS Amos 26.

Figure 1

The Hypothesized Model of the Interrelationships among Emotional Intelligence, Achievement Goals, Cultural Identity, Self-Actualization, and L2 Proficiency



3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study involved 319 B.A. EFL students from various universities across Iran, including 223 females and 96 males aged 18 to 35. The participants were selected through convenience sampling. Demographic details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants in the Study

University	City	Location	Frequency	Percent
Ferdowsi University	Mashhad	East	77	24.4
Shahid Bahonar University	Kerman	Southeast	76	23.8
Bu-Ali Sina University	Hamedan	West	52	16.3
Shahid Chamran University	Ahvaz	South	18	5.6
University of Mazandaran	Mazandaran	North	15	4.7
Urmia University	Urmia	Northwest	11	3.4
Razi University	Kermanshah	West	9	2.8
Gonbad Kavous University	Gonbad-e Kavous	North	8	2.5
University of Kurdistan	Sanandaj	West	7	2.2
University of Sistan and Baluchestan	Zahedan	Southeast	6	1.9
University of Isfahan	Isfahan	Center	5	1.6

Yazd University	Yazd	Center	5	1.6
Semnan University	Semnan	Center	5	1.6
University of Qom	Qom	Center	4	1.3
University of Mohaghegh Ardebili	Ardebil	Northwest	3	0.9
Ilam University	Ilam	West	3	0.9
University of Zanzan	Zanzan	Northwest	3	0.9
Lorestan University	Khorramabad	West	2	0.6
Shahrekord University	Shahrekord	Center	2	0.6
Allameh Tabatabaei University	Tehran	Center	2	0.6
Arak University	Arak	Center	2	0.6
University of Tabriz	Tabriz	Northwest	1	0.3
Shiraz University	Shiraz	Southwest	1	0.3
University of Kashan	Kashan	Center	1	0.3
Imam Khomeini International University	Qazvin	Center	1	0.3
Total			319	100.0

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

The Self-Reporting Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), developed by Schutte et al. (1998), consists of 33 items. Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"). The test's reliability was confirmed by the researchers, who reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87. Further calculations by the researchers resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. The researchers also assessed the data's appropriateness for factor analysis and its construct validity using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = .81). The KMO rating was categorized as "meritorious" based on Kaiser's (1974) standards. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2658.971$, $df = 528$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlation matrix was factorable. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring with varimax rotation was conducted, which supported a multi-factor structure consistent with the theoretical dimensions outlined in the original development and validation of the SSEIT (Schutte et al., 1998). The total variance explained by the analysis was 58.3%, supporting the construct validity of the SSEIT in this study.

3.2.2 Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ)

Elliott and McGregor (2001) developed the Achievement Goal Questionnaire, which contains 12 items (three for each goal type: performance-approach, mastery-avoidance, mastery-approach, and performance-avoidance), and all respondents were asked to use a seven-point Likert scale (i.e., with values ranging from 1 'not at all true of me' to 7 'very true of me') to answer the items. Elliott and McGregor (2001) provided Cronbach's alpha coefficients of more than 0.80 for all scales, suggesting satisfactory reliability. In the current study, the authors calculated a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.86. To assess the factorability of the data and provide validity evidence, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was calculated (KMO = 0.79),

falling within the 'middling' to 'meritorious' range (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2504.174$, $df = 66$, $p < 0.001$), confirming sufficient correlations among items for factor analysis. To validate the hypothesized 2×2 factor structure (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) within our sample, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. The model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2/df = 2.45$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.93, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06. These results support the structural validity of the four-factor achievement goal framework for use with Iranian EFL learners.

3.2.3 Cultural Identity Clarity Scale

The research used Osborne and Taylor's (2010) Cultural Identity Clarity Scale (a modified version of Campbell et al.'s (1996) Self-Concept Clarity Scale), measuring eight aspects of the cultural identity of respondents. Responses to the eight scales were scored from 0 to 10. Osborne and Taylor (2010) obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, demonstrating high reliability. Moreover, the researchers computed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75. Validity evidence was sought by first examining the factorability of the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.84, indicating 'meritorious' sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 833.769$, $df = 28$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the appropriateness of factor analysis. An exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis) revealed a single-factor solution with an eigenvalue greater than 1, accounting for 54.6% of the total variance. This one-dimensional solution is consistent with the intended functioning of the scale (Osborne & Taylor, 2010) and supports construct validity for this measure of cultural identity clarity in the Iranian EFL context.

3.2.4 Self-Actualization Index

Jones and Crandall's (1986) Self-Actualization Scale was used in this study, a highly validated scale for assessing self-actualization. There are 15 items measuring personal feelings, beliefs, tendencies, and emotions. The scale, having been validated often and with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.69$, was employed as it was determined to be reliable. The authors of this research estimated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. To evaluate construct validity, the factorability of the data was assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.70, which is considered 'middling' but acceptable for proceeding with factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 584.043$, $df = 105$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the inter-item correlations were sufficient for factor analysis. A principal component analysis extracted one component with an eigenvalue above 1, explaining 52.1% of the variance. This single factor supports the unidimensional conceptualization of the short-index of self-actualization by Jones and Crandall (1986) and thus provides support for the construct validity of this measure for use in this study.

3.2.5 Grade Point Average as Language Proficiency Scale

Language proficiency among students was measured through the Grade Point Average (GPA) in three elementary English classes – Grammar 1 and 2, Conversation 1 and 2, and Reading Comprehension 1 and 2 – that were taught before the questionnaire surveys were administered. Ethical clearance to obtain students' GPAs was sought by submitting a formal request to the education bureaus of the concerned institutions.

3.3 Procedure

In this study, 319 Iranian undergraduate EFL students (96 males, 223 females) from different Iranian universities were recruited using convenience non-random sampling. Data gathering took three months and to avoid participant fatigue, the questionnaires were administered in two sessions. The COVID-19 pandemic made face-to-face access infeasible; hence, online questionnaires using Google Forms and virtual locations like Telegram and WhatsApp were employed. The researcher gave clear instructions and created an explanatory audio file to clarify any misunderstandings. Descriptive and inferential statistics data analysis was performed to answer the research questions.

3.4 Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling was selected over multiple regression analysis for several reasons. First, SEM enables the concurrent testing of several dependent variables, thus allowing an overall assessment of the hypothesized model concerning emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, and self-actualization as independent variables that relate directly and indirectly to L2 proficiency. This is in contrast to regression, which tests individual dependent relationships rather than evaluating a model's total fit within an overall research framework. Therefore, SEM provides a more comprehensive evaluation of the extent to which the proposed theoretical framework is supported by the empirical data available (Kline, 2016). Second, SEM allows for explicitly incorporating measurement error into the analysis, which will yield more accurate estimates of the parameters that comprise the SEM analysis. Third, the path analysis feature of SEM is intended for testing both the direct and indirect pathways among constructs, as sought through our research purposes of validating a model of interrelationships rather than simply establishing bivariate relationships.

The participants' answers were compared with their GPAs on three general English courses. Initially, data normality was tested. Factorial analysis on all the questionnaires was run in order to verify validity in the Iranian environment using KMO, sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's Test. Reliability coefficients were then recalculated. Pearson correlation was applied to investigate the relationship and predictive power among the four variables (cultural identity, achievement goals, self-actualization, and emotional intelligence) and L2 proficiency for Research Questions 1-4. Finally, path analysis was conducted to determine the fit of the final model with the hypothesized model for Research Question 5, resulting in model improvements for the Iranian EFL context.

3.5 Assessment of SEM Assumptions

Before conducting structural equation modeling analysis, a number of important SEM assumptions were evaluated in order to verify the validity of the statistical conclusions drawn (Kline, 2016). The study sample of 319 was characterized as sufficiently large, exceeding the 200 minimum number of cases and providing an adequate number of participants to the parameter ratio to give stable estimates (Boomsma, 1982; Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). Using Mardia's coefficient, the multivariate normality assumption was measured, and moderate multivariate kurtosis was indicated, and thus fell within acceptable limits for maximum likelihood estimation given our sample size (West et al., 1995). The univariate normality assumption was also demonstrated for all of the observed variables, with skewness and kurtosis statistics all within the acceptable range of ± 2 (George & Mallery, 2019).

Evidence for the lack of multicollinearity of the predictors was provided through assessment of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores, which were found to be below the accepted cut-off point of 10, therefore indicating that there is no significant degree of intercorrelation among the predictors (Hair et al., 2019). Scatterplot matrices were used to analyze the degree of linearity of the relationship between variables and suggested that variables have approximately linear relationships with one another and that there were no obvious curvilinear trends in the data. Potential outliers were examined using standardized scores and Mahalanobis distance; no univariate or multivariate outliers were identified that exceeded established critical values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Missing data comprised less than 1% of the dataset, and Little's MCAR test indicated that the data were missing completely at random. Given the minimal and random nature of the missing values, listwise deletion was employed, which is considered appropriate for SEM under these conditions (Enders, 2010). Finally, the factorability of the overall correlation matrix was confirmed through Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which was significant, and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy that exceeded the recommended threshold of .60 (Kaiser, 1974). These diagnostic checks collectively confirm that the data met the fundamental assumptions required for SEM, thereby supporting the validity of the subsequent path analysis.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the obtained reliability estimates of the research instruments in the present study.

Table 2

Results of Cronbach's Alpha Indexes

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test	33	.82
Achievement Goal	12	.86
Cultural Identity Clarity	8	.75
Self-Actualization Index	15	.81

As it is evident in Table 2, using Cronbach's alpha, all the questionnaires were found to have high and acceptable reliability indices. Now, the results of each research question are provided below.

4.1 Is There a Statistically Significant Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Emotional Intelligence and Their L2 Proficiency?

To answer the first research question, Pearson correlation was used. Table 3 shows the results of the Pearson correlation between EFL learners' emotional intelligence and their L2 proficiency.

Table 3*Pearson Correlation between EFL Learners' Emotional Intelligence and L2 Proficiency*

		Emotional Intelligence
L2 Proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.48**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	319

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the results of the Pearson correlation indicate, there was a significant positive relationship ($r=0.48$, $n=319$, $p<.05$) between EFL learners' emotional intelligence and L2 proficiency.

4.2 Is There a Statistically Significant Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Achievement Goal and their L2 proficiency?

To answer the second research question in the quantitative phase, Pearson correlation was adopted. Table 4 shows the results of the Pearson correlation between EFL learners' achievement goal and their L2 proficiency.

Table 4*Pearson Correlation between EFL Learners' Achievement Goal and L2 Proficiency*

		Achievement Goal
L2 Proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.41**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	319

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the results of the Pearson correlation indicate, there was a significant positive relationship ($r= 0.41$, $n=319$, $p<.05$) between EFL learners' achievement goal and their L2 proficiency.

4.3 Is There a Statistically Significant Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Cultural Identity and their L2 Proficiency?

To answer the third research question, Pearson correlation was used. Table 5 shows the results of the Pearson correlation between EFL learners' cultural identity and their L2 proficiency.

Table 5*Pearson Correlation between EFL Learners' Cultural Identity and L2 Proficiency*

		Cultural Identity
L2 Proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.45**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	319

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the results of the Pearson correlation indicate, there was a significant positive relationship ($r= 0.45$, $n=319$, $p<.05$) between EFL learners' cultural identity and their L2 proficiency.

4.4 Is There a Statistically Significant Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Self-Actualization and Their L2 Proficiency?

To answer the fourth research question, Pearson correlation and path analysis were used. Table 6 shows the results of the Pearson Correlation between EFL learners' self-actualization and their L2 proficiency.

Table 6

Pearson Correlation between EFL Learners' Self-Actualization and L2 Proficiency

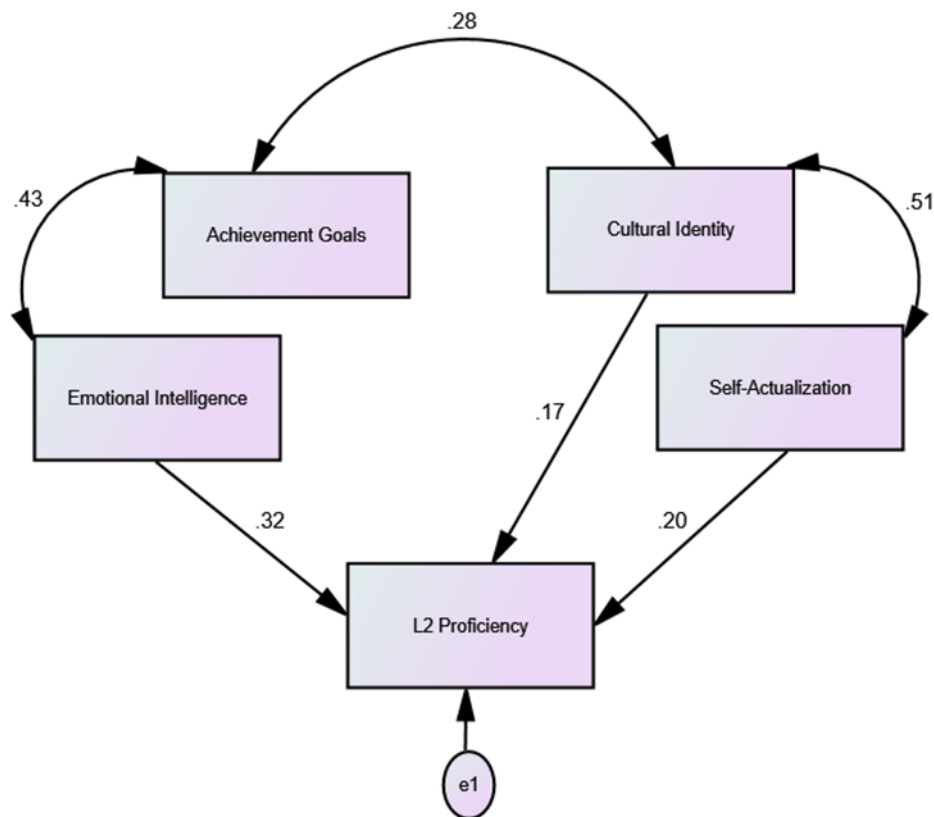
		Self-Actualization
L2 Proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.43**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	319

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the results of the Pearson correlation indicate, there was a significant positive relationship ($r= 0.43$, $n=319$, $p<.05$) between EFL learners' self-actualization and their L2 proficiency.

4.5 What Is a Theoretically Consistent and Empirically Well-Fitting Structural Model Depicting the Interrelationships among Emotional Intelligence, Achievement Goal, Cultural Identity, Self-Actualization, and L2 Proficiency in Iranian EFL Learners' Language Learning Context?

Regarding the fifth research question and to test the hypothesized model (Figure 1), an SEM analysis was run to identify a theoretically consistent and empirically well-fitting structural model (Figure 2).

Figure 2*The Valid Model*

4.5.1 Confirmatory Analyses

For confirmatory analysis, SEM was used to determine whether the hypothesized model fits the observed data and to determine whether indirect (mediation) effects exist among the variables; therefore, going beyond simple correlation, which will examine how the constructs influence the L2 proficiency. This analysis attempts to fill the gap in prior correlational studies by determining whether emotional intelligence, cultural identity, self-actualization, or achievement goals act as mediators of L2 proficiency, or whether these variables directly affect each other as stated in the theoretical framework (Figure 1). The Amos 24 statistical software was used to conduct the analyses. Several fit indices were considered to identify the model fit: the magnitude of the chi-square, which should not be significant, Chi-square/df ratio, which should be less than 2 or 3, the normed fit index (NFI), the good fit index (GFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI) with the cut-value of more than 0.90, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of around 0.06 or 0.07 (Schreiber et al., 2006). Figure 3 presents the interrelationship model for the variables. To verify the strengths of the relationships between the components, standardized estimates were checked.

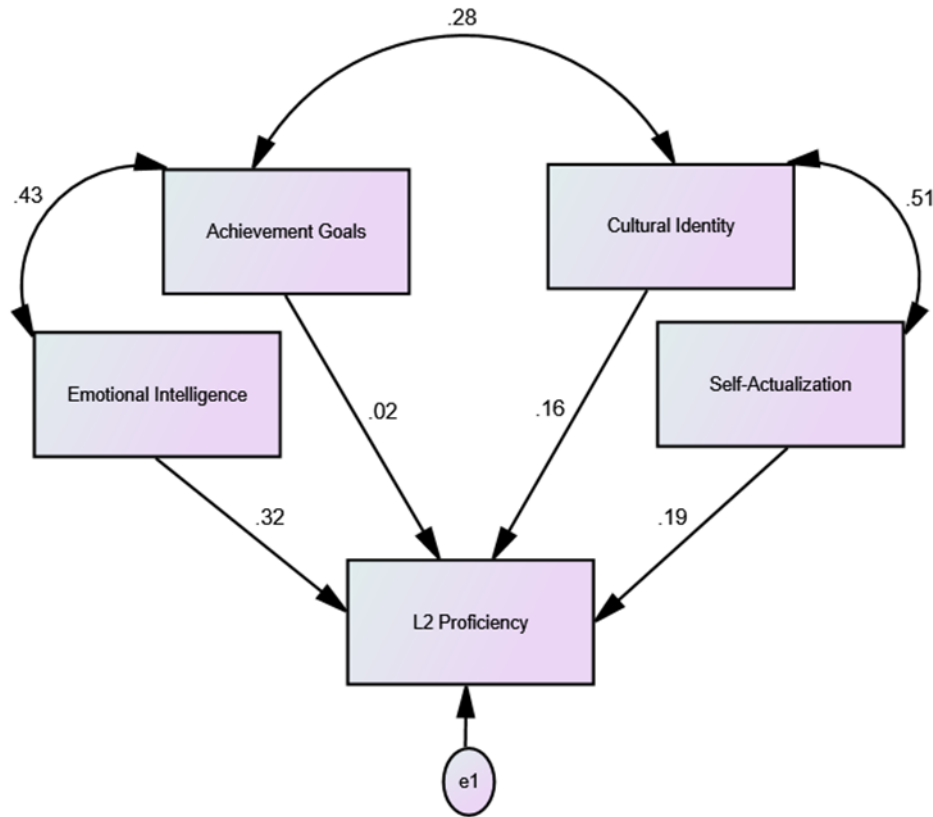
Figure 3*The Model of Interrelationship among Variables*

Table 7 shows goodness-of-fit indices.

Table 7*Goodness of Fit Indices*

	X2/df	NFI	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable Fit	<3	>.90	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	3.02	.88	.90	.89	.07

As evident in Table 7, some of the fit indices (i.e., chi-square/df ratio (3.02), NFI (.88), and CFI (.89) did not meet the acceptable standards of model fit. The model was thus modified. To modify the model, the non-significant path from achievement goals to L2 proficiency was deleted ($\beta = .02$, $p > .05$). This modification was theoretically and statistically justified. Theoretically, the non-significant direct path from Achievement Goals (AG) to L2 Proficiency aligns with the Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) perspective underpinning our model (de Bot et al., 2007), which posits that complex outcomes like language proficiency emerge from the interaction of multiple subsystems. In this view, motivational factors like AG may exert their influence indirectly by shaping affective and identity-related processes (e.g., EI, SA, CI) rather than directly determining proficiency. Statistically, the path was non-significant ($p > .05$), and

its removal led to a meaningful improvement in model fit, bringing all indices within acceptable thresholds (see Table 8). This parsimonious, data-driven adjustment enhances the model's empirical validity without compromising its theoretical coherence.

Figure 4 presents the model of the interrelationship of the variables after modification.

Figure 4

The Model of Interrelationship among Variables after Modification

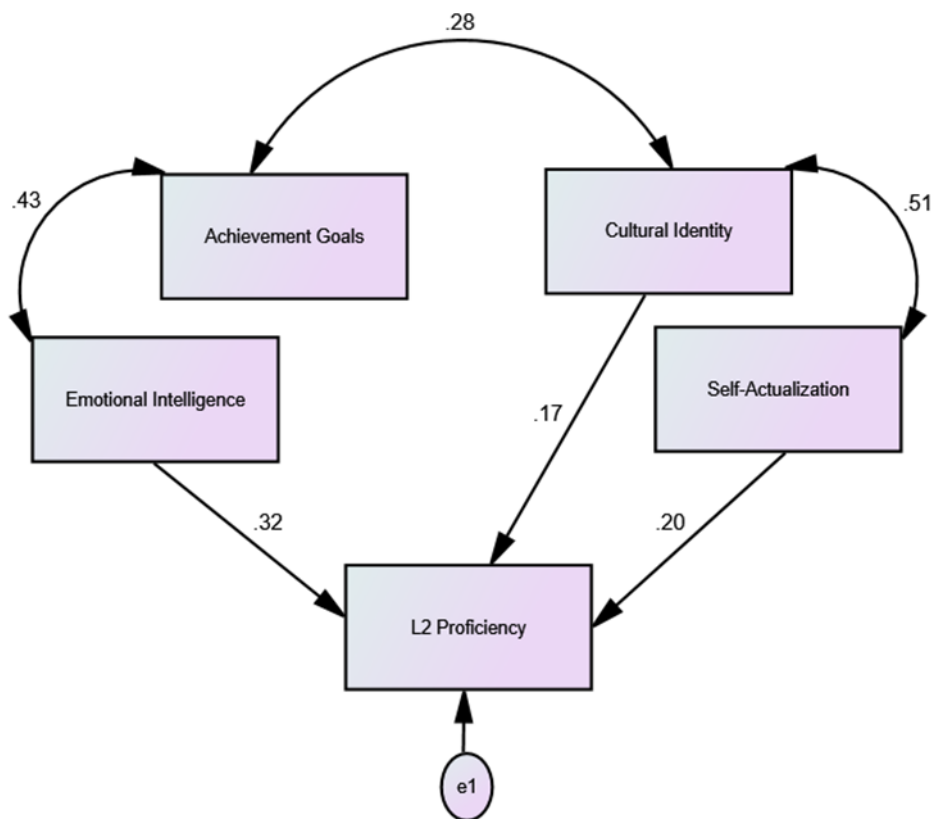


Table 8 shows goodness-of-fit indices after modification.

Table 8

Goodness of Fit Indices after Modification

	X2/df	NFI	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable Fit	<3	>.90	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	2.91	.91	.93	.91	.07

As evident in Table 8, all the fit indices (i.e., chi-square/df ratio (2.91), RMSEA (.07), NFI (.91), GFI (.93), and CFI (.91)) fall within the acceptable fit values. Therefore, it is clear that the model perfectly fitted the empirical data after modification. Furthermore, as evident in Figure 4, every path has an estimate. This standardized estimate is the standardized coefficient or the beta coefficient (β) of an analysis conducted on independent variables that have been standardized. It describes the predictive power of the independent variable and the effect sizes.

Larger absolute values for the beta coefficients (β) indicate a stronger relationship between the variables.

To evaluate the statistical significance and strength of the relationships depicted in the final model (Figure 4), the standardized (β) and unstandardized (B) path coefficients, along with their standard errors (SE), critical ratios (C.R.), and p-values, were examined. The results are summarized as follows:

- Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ L2 Proficiency: $\beta = 0.32$, $B = 0.215$, $SE = 0.045$, $C.R. = 4.778$, $p < .001$
- Cultural Identity $\rightarrow$ L2 Proficiency: $\beta = 0.26$, $B = 0.188$, $SE = 0.049$, $C.R. = 3.837$, $p < .001$
- Self-Actualization $\rightarrow$ L2 Proficiency: $\beta = 0.28$, $B = 0.199$, $SE = 0.042$, $C.R. = 4.738$, $p < .001$
- Achievement Goals $\rightarrow$ Emotional Intelligence: $\beta = 0.15$, $B = 0.121$, $SE = 0.053$, $C.R. = 2.283$, $p = .022$
- Achievement Goals $\rightarrow$ Cultural Identity: $\beta = 0.12$, $B = 0.097$, $SE = 0.048$, $C.R. = 2.021$, $p = .043$
- Achievement Goals $\rightarrow$ Self-Actualization: $\beta = 0.18$, $B = 0.142$, $SE = 0.051$, $C.R. = 2.784$, $p = .005$
- Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ Self-Actualization: $\beta = 0.35$, $B = 0.271$, $SE = 0.047$, $C.R. = 5.766$, $p < .001$
- Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ Cultural Identity: $\beta = 0.22$, $B = 0.183$, $SE = 0.050$, $C.R. = 3.660$, $p < .001$

As shown, all direct paths to L2 proficiency were statistically significant ($p < .001$). Emotional intelligence demonstrated the strongest direct effect on L2 proficiency ($\beta = 0.32$), followed by self-actualization ($\beta = 0.28$) and cultural identity ($\beta = 0.26$). Achievement goals did not directly predict L2 proficiency but showed significant indirect effects through emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = .022$), cultural identity ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = .043$), and self-actualization ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = .005$). These results confirm that emotional intelligence serves as the most influential predictor, while achievement goals function as antecedent motivators rather than direct determinants of language proficiency.

4.5.2 Examination of Indirect Effects

To further explain the interrelationships provided in the theoretical framework and address whether the model offers explanatory power beyond direct correlations, bootstrap analyses for indirect effects were conducted (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Using 5,000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals (95%), we examined whether emotional intelligence, cultural identity, or self-actualization mediated the non-significant direct path from achievement goals to L2 proficiency. The results indicated no significant indirect effects of AG on L2 proficiency through EI ($\beta = .02$, 95% CI $[-.01, .05]$), CI ($\beta = .01$, 95% CI $[-.02, .04]$), or SA ($\beta = .02$, 95% CI $[-.01, .05]$). This confirms that AG's relationship with L2 proficiency in this model is not mediated by the other affective and identity factors.

However, significant indirect effects were found in other parts of the model. Most notably, emotional intelligence showed a significant indirect effect on L2 Proficiency through self-actualization ($\beta = .11$, 95% CI $[.05, .18]$), indicating that part of EI's positive influence on language proficiency operates by enhancing learners' self-actualization. This finding adds a

layer of explanatory depth, suggesting a mechanism—personal growth and realization of potential—through which emotional skills translate into language learning success.

5. Discussion

The current study investigated the intercorrelations among emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 proficiency. The participants were 319 Iranian B.A. EFL majors from different universities. The analytical approach of first examining bivariate correlations (Research Questions 1-4) before testing the comprehensive SEM (Research Question 5) follows a logical progression common in path analytic studies (e.g., Kline, 2016). By establishing a significant pairwise association between variables, we provide preliminary support for the inclusion of these variables in a more complex interrelated model. We also demonstrate that the proposed theoretical pathways shown in Figure 1 are substantiated by data; therefore, we have a more complete rationale for testing the interrelated operation of the proposed variables within a single system.

The first research question tried to explore whether there was a correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and L2 proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. The results of Pearson correlation revealed that these variables were significantly and positively correlated. The findings agree with Goleman's (1995) observation that EI is a key predictor of life success, since it allows people to self-motivate to success. In line with earlier research, the current research affirms the results of Taheri et al. (2019) that proposed strong correlations between the foreign/second language proficiency and different elements of EI. Likewise, findings were consistent with Chen and Zhang (2020) and Esmaeeli et al. (2018), who proposed strong correlations between EI and speaking skills of EFL learners, considering EI as a factor in predicting speaking and listening skills.

In addition, the results are consistent with Soodmand Afshar and Karbakhsh Ravari (2017) and MacCann et al. (2011), who indicated that there were strong correlations between EI and L2 academic performance and proficiency, as well as between the coping style of EFL learners. These results, however, contradict Pope et al. (2012) and Barisonek (2005), who indicated that there is no relationship between academic achievement and overall EI. Conversely, Degirmenci and Yavuz (2024) found that at the macro level, emotional intelligence has no statistically significant effect on language learning achievements, i.e., language capacities are determined by cognitive as well as non-cognitive factors. The contribution of EI to language learning and L2 proficiency seems to differ with respect to context and interpretation of findings.

It is not surprising that there are differences in findings about EI's importance, as perhaps its effects are a function of both interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills, as well as emotion regulation. To elaborate, speaking proficiency is a complex skill that focuses on emotional self-awareness together with interpersonal skills. Moreover, the effect of EI on reading proficiency might involve personal control over anxiety levels and text engagement, while the effect of EI on listening proficiency could involve self-confidence and self-esteem. These findings expand current knowledge of EI, understanding that it is a complex construct that might have an effect on different aspects of the second language acquisition process. Future studies should advance this knowledge by isolating how a particular aspect of EI affects a specific aspect of second language proficiency.

The findings revealed a high positive correlation between achievement goals and L2 proficiency. The results of this study align with those of Church et al. (2001) and Mohammadi Ghavam et al. (2011), who demonstrated the positive effect of achievement goals on academic success among EFL students. Furthermore, the results are aligned with those reported by Ng'Ang' a et al. (2018) and Shehzad (2019) regarding the significant positive correlation between select achievement goals and academic success. The results of this study are also consistent with those of Shyr et al. (2017) and Mohammadi Ghavam et al. (2011) regarding the significant relation between mastery-approach goals of EFL learners and implementation of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by EFL learners. However, the findings of this study are inconsistent with those of Elliot (1999), who identified specific relationships between types of achievement goals and factors like effort, processing depth (surface vs. deep), and test performance.

Additionally, they are in contrast with those of Chen & Wong (2014), who found that there are no links between mastery goals and academic success. By examining the more nuanced view of achievement goal orientations in the process of learning languages, we can better understand the role of goal orientations in language learning. Mastery goals lead to stability in motivation and, hence, academic success. People with mastery goals have the potential to engage more with the content and use cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This is what is meant by a growth-oriented mentality to learning languages, where you see any obstacle or problem you face as an opportunity to grow, thus creating a resilient and flexible way of approaching learning new languages. On the other hand, if an individual places a priority on avoiding failure or losing things they want to obtain, this creates a sense of shame, fear, and anxiety.

Such feelings can negatively influence one's motivation to learn a foreign language and lead to cognitive interference. The negative effect associated with avoidance goals may promote the employment of shallow learning techniques, which would ultimately hamper one's ability to reach a higher level of language proficiency. Therefore, the negative correlation between avoidance goals and L2 proficiency makes sense, as creating a self-destructive learning environment with failure as a constant threat will undoubtedly create an obstacle to one's language-learning path. Furthermore, the environment within which achievement goals are pursued is also an important contributor to the impact of goals on L2-learning efforts.

Cultural, social, economic, and individual learner attributes can play a role in how achievement goals are defined within the context of a language learning project. For example, learning competitively may produce short-term successes but have negative long-term effects, particularly concerning anxiety and avoidance of further language-learning experiences. On the other hand, when the conditions of learning are facilitative for mastering and self-enhancement, goal achievement might have a strongly positive and stable input for language proficiency. Related findings imply the complexity of a relationship between language proficiency in L2 and achievement goals, which indicate that the importance of goals is acknowledged, but that L2 language proficiency is a matter that is dependent on types of goals, affective experiences, and conditions of instruction. Further research is required on these factors to develop a full comprehension of how best to use goal achievement for language learning purposes.

The third question probed the relation between L2 proficiency and cultural identity among Iranian EFL learners. Pearson correlation analysis indicated that there was a significant

and strong positive correlation between cultural identity and L2 proficiency. The results confirm Robinson and Biran (2006) and Rust (2008), who reported strong and significant positive correlations between African or cultural identity and academic success. The results are also consistent with Khoravi and Naeini (2020) and Kia et al. (2021), who reported positive relationships between cultural identity and English speaking proficiency and willingness to communicate. Similarly, the findings corroborate Taherkhani and Ravari's (2018) study, which indicated a significant relationship between cultural identity and L2 achievement among Iranian EFL learners.

However, findings are contrary to those of Lieb (2019) and Rashidi and Mansurian (2015), who could not identify any relationship between cultural identity tests and English accomplishment or language skill. The findings are also contrary to those of Peng and Patterson (2021) and Mohammadi and Izadpanah (2019), in which there was no relationship between American identity and English skill, and in which there was a negative relationship between the sociocultural identity of the learners and EFL learning.

Cultural identity has a strong effect on foreign language acquisition, and a great deal of that influence is unavoidable due to the close relationship between culture and language. Language goes beyond being a method of communication; it also carries with it the culture and cultural identity. The level of acculturation achieved can help determine how proficient one can use a second language; that is, one cannot fully achieve proficiency without going through the process of acculturation. This reinforces the idea that language acquisition cannot be viewed as only the acquisition of linguistic skills; rather, it must include the acquisition of cultural knowledge, values, behaviours, and skills that are paramount within the target community.

It is widely recognized that cultural competence enables language learners to be successful. Culturally competent language learners can combine their own cultural background with the culture of others, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate in a language. In addition to understanding only the linguistic structures of a language, language learners need additional tools to communicate effectively and completely. Language learners must understand the culture of the people who use that language and understand how the culture expresses its identity through language. Cultural identity plays a significant role in developing language skills because it provides a foundation on which to build a relationship with the process of acquiring new language skills. Cultural identity helps to create a rich cultural context in which cultural instruction can be incorporated into the teaching of the language. Linguistic competence and cultural competence develop together; linguistic competence will increase the student's ability to appreciate the full nature of his/her language ability while developing cultural competence in the same way.

Because of the convergence between language ability and cultural identity, a culturally responsive language curriculum is required. The teacher needs to incorporate their students' cultural backgrounds and identities. The creation of a supportive learning environment in which students are encouraged to improve their language abilities is one way to achieve this goal.

Cultural identity is not merely something that can be placed on top of the learning process of a language, but rather is an integral element in shaping the process by which an individual learns a language. Integrating cultural training into language instruction can provide students with more successful and relevant language acquisition, and can lead to the development of greater mastery and awareness of their own culture. This integrated approach

to language acquisition recognizes the interrelationship between language and culture, and ultimately, enables learners to be successful in their ability to acquire a language.

The fourth question asked whether there is a relationship between self-actualization and L2 proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. According to the results of the questionnaire, there were very strong positive correlations between self-actualization and L2 proficiency. This is consistent with the findings of Ordun & Akun (2017) and Pausanos (2014), who found positive correlations between emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-actualization. The present study's findings also support those of Eswari (2017) and Solaja (2015) and demonstrate the positive effect of self-actualization on academic and organizational performance. Lastly, the findings from the present study also align with the findings from Kumar et al. (2020) and Davidson et al. (2007), who have also established positive relationships between self-actualization and creative and normal work performance and different achievement orientation types. The findings are also consistent with the study results of Rastegar and Fatemi (2017), Moghadam and Ghapanchi (2018), and Torabi (2020), all of whom reported positive correlations between creativity, multiple intelligences, oral skills, and self-actualization among EFL learners.

The above findings, however, contradict the findings of Vaughn et al. (2009) and Mohammadi et al. (2016), who obtained negative correlations between test anxiety and some dimensions of attachment styles as well as self-actualization among language learners. School success and self-actualization have positive and strong connections that can be accounted for by understanding human motivation and needs. Human beings are motivated by different needs, and these needs control their action, effort, and behavior. These needs produce motivational beliefs which lead to specific attitudes, activities, or movements. When human beings are informed of their fundamental needs and given the proper environment and equipment to fulfill them, they will be apt to reach personal development and the flowering of their potential. This is under Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where self-actualization serves as the pinnacle of human motivation.

Self-actualization is the highest aim, which compels the individual to realize their potential and understand what they can do. Self-actualized people usually have correct information regarding reality, acceptance of themselves, others, and the world, spontaneity, higher social interest, creativity, and direction in solving problems. They are also likely to enjoy good interpersonal relationships that will further improve their academic and working lives.

The link between self-actualization and L2 proficiency suggests that more self-actualized learners may approach language learning with greater motivation, purpose, and resilience. These students tend to have a higher degree of involvement in their education, set more ambitious personal goals, and face barriers more easily. Other traits linked to self-actualization include self-acceptance, acceptance of others, originality, and innovative problem resolution techniques, all of which provide learners with additional tools for handling the challenges related to learning new languages. Learners who achieve self-actualization are more likely to effectively deal with the emotional and psychological aspects of learning a second language, including the various forms of anxiety, feelings of impotence, and concerns of failure that accompany the process. Additionally, learners who have greater emotional intelligence will likely hold positive attitudes and have a heightened focus on their ultimate goals, eventually resulting in increased proficiency when learning a new language.

The connection between L2 proficiency and self-actualization demonstrates why it is essential to place an emphasis on affective and psychological factors in L2 acquisition. Therefore, teachers must use techniques that encourage students to be self-actualized, e.g., provide a supportive environment for learning, aid in developing a sense of identity, and assist in setting personal accomplishments. Also, by encouraging self-actualization along with L2 proficiency, teachers will aid students in developing a second language and support their development outside the classroom, contributing to their success both as individuals within and beyond the language classroom.

The last research question sought to determine a valid model of relationships between the study variables among Iranian EFL learners. The final model, achieved by removing the non-significant direct path from achievement goals to L2 proficiency, is both theoretically sound and empirically superior. The path coefficients revealed that emotional intelligence had the strongest direct effect on L2 proficiency ($\beta = 0.32, p < .001$), followed by self-actualization ($\beta = 0.28, p < .001$) and cultural identity ($\beta = 0.26, p < .001$), confirming their roles as significant predictors. The findings revealed that Figure 4 is a valid model with emotional intelligence, achievement goals, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 proficiency, and all variables except achievement goals are significant predictors of L2 proficiency. Of particular concern, emotional intelligence was identified as the best predictor of L2 proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. The results highlight the central role that emotional intelligence plays in second language acquisition as an indication that students who possess higher emotional intelligence are themselves able to withstand the emotional strain of language learning, such as anxiety, motivation, and resilience. The absence of predictive ability of achievement goals would imply that goal-setting is central, but could not necessarily lead to language proficiency in the absence of emotional and cultural support. This supports the contention that successful language learning is a complex process, with power derived from the interaction of a set of emotional, cultural, and self-actualization determiners that collectively build proficiency.

Moreover, SEM analysis also allowed for the exploration of indirect effects, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the constructs than only correlational analyses. Specifically, while the achievement goals had no direct or mediated relationship with L2 proficiency, the analysis identified that emotional intelligence has an indirect relationship with L2 proficiency via self-actualization. This indicates that learners with high levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to pursue self-actualization. Ultimately, this pursuit will contribute to higher levels of language proficiency. The mediating effect of self-actualization provides an explanatory mechanism: EI provides a framework that contains the resources necessary for personal development (self-actualization), and in turn creates an optimal environment for long-term language learning. This finding supports the complex, process-oriented nature of the constructs, as well as showing how SEM is able to identify relationships between constructs that would not be evident as separate constructs through bivariate correlational studies.

6. Limitations

Although this study has some contributions, it also has some limitations. Convenience non-random sampling may result in selection bias, and restricting the sample to B.A. level learners of EFL may decrease the generalizability of findings to other proficiency levels. In addition, using grade point average (GPA) as the L2 proficiency measure and recruiting only

native Persian speakers further limits the generalizability of the results to other linguistic and cultural contexts.

7. Conclusion and Implications

The primary objective of this study was to explore the relationships between social, cultural, cognitive, and affective factors and L2 proficiency and to develop a valid model for the Iranian EFL context. Findings revealed that there were high positive correlations between emotional intelligence, cultural identity, self-actualization, and L2 proficiency. Among these factors, emotional intelligence was the strongest predictor, whereas achievement goals were not significant predictors of L2 proficiency.

The findings presented here add to what we know about English Language Teaching (ELT) by emphasizing how important emotional, cultural, and self-actualization factors are for developing proficiency in English. In addition, these same factors may also be significant in other countries and provide valuable information to help teachers, learners, and curriculum developers everywhere. Also, the study's findings add a theoretical dimension by expanding L2 skills theory through the inclusion of social/affective factors for L2 acquisition, thereby helping to develop a more complete understanding of language acquisition.

In practice, the research implies that English teachers make learners aware of the effect of such factors and enhance their pedagogical practice by integrating strategies for emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and self-actualization. Teachers should also focus on helping students set and accomplish goals while creating a learning context supportive of cultural identity and self-actualization. For curriculum planners, the findings indicate a need to design curricula that address social, cultural, cognitive, and emotional needs when creating their proposed curricula.

8. About the Authors

Reza Taherkhani is an associate professor of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran. His research interests include SLA, ESP/EAP, and teacher education. He has been teaching many English courses at Bu-Ali Sina University since 2006, and he has done research on his areas of interest. He has published articles in prestigious journals including “Foreign Language Annals”, “Journal of English for Academic Purposes”, “The Journal of Asia TEFL”, and “Journal of Academic Ethics”.

Hashem Sharafi has received his MA in TEFL from Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran. He is interested in second/foreign language learning, especially from a psychological perspective, and the role of individual differences.

9. Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all the participants who generously devoted their time and effort to take part in this study.

10. Declaration of AI Use

The authors declare that DeepSeek was used in preparation of the manuscript for checking spelling and grammar correction. In addition, the authors confirm that the design of the study, data collection, data analysis, and all the other sections of the study were conceived and written by the authors. No part of the scholarly content, interpretation, or argumentation

was generated by artificial intelligence. However, the AI tool (DeepSeek) was used only for paraphrasing some sentences to raise the clarity of the text.

11. References

- Azimzadeh Khoravi, G., & Bemani Naeini, M. (2020). Interrelationships of willingness to speak and cultural identity with English L2 speaking proficiency. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching & Research*, 8(29), 45–58.
- Barisonek, E. S. (2005). *The relationship between emotional intelligence, academic achievement and academic production among third and sixth-grade students*. (Master's thesis). The State University of New York.
- Boomsma, A. (1982). The robustness of LISREL against small sample sizes in factor analysis models. In K. G. Jöreskog & H. Wold (Eds.), *Systems under indirect observation: Causality, structure, prediction* (pp. 149–173). North-Holland.
- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching: A course in second language acquisition* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Campbell, J. D., Trapnell, P. D., Heine, S. J., Katz, I. M., Lavallee, L. F., & Lehman, D. R. (1996). Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(1), 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.70.1.141>
- Chang, B. (2010). Cultural identity in Korean English. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 131–145.
- Chen, W. W., & Wong, Y. L. (2014). The relationship between goal orientation and academic achievement in Hong Kong: The role of context. *Asia-Pacific Educational Research*, 24(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-013-0169-7>
- Chen, Z., & Zhang, P. (2020). Trait emotional intelligence and second language performance: a case study of Chinese EFL learners. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 43(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1767633>
- Church, M. A., Elliot, A. J., & Gable, S. L. (2001). Perceptions of classroom environment, achievement goals, and achievement outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(1), 43–54. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.93.1.43>
- Davidson, W. B., Bromfield, J. M., & Beck, H. P. (2007). Beneficial academic orientations and self-actualization of college students. *Psychological Reports*, 100(2), 604–612. <https://doi.org/10.2466/PRO.100.2.604-612>
- de Bot, K., Lowie, W., & Verspoor, M. (2007). A dynamic systems theory approach to second language acquisition. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 10(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728906002732>
- Degirmenci, G. A., & Yavuz, M. A. (2024). The impact of emotional intelligence on language learning achievements in university EFL students. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(1), 105–116. <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v9i1.5296>
- Desta, M. A. (2019). An investigation into English foreign language learning anxiety and English language performance test result: Ethiopian university students in focus. *International Journal of Research in English Education (IJREE)*, 4(4), 83–100.
- Dweck, C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. *American Psychologist*, 41(10), 1040–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.10.1040>

- Elliot, A. J. (1999). Approach and avoidance motivation and achievement goals. *Educational Psychologist*, 34(6), 169–189. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3403_3
- Elliot, A. J., & McGregor, H. A. (2001). A 2 × 2 achievement goal framework. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80(3), 501–519. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.80.3.501>
- Enders, C. K. (2010). *Applied missing data analysis*. Guilford Press.
- Esmaeeli, Z., Khalili Sabet, M., & Shahabi, Y. (2018). The relationship between emotional intelligence and speaking skills of Iranian advanced EFL learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(5), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.5p.22>
- Eswari, S. V. (2017). Self-actualization and academic performance: Ethnographical approach. *Global Journal for Research Analysis (GJRA)*, 6(12), 495–497.
- Farzan, S. (2015). Affective factors in English language teaching for professionals. *Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 1(1), 20–35.
- Feng, E., & Li, C. (2024). Examining the role of achievement goals in L2 learning: A cross-sectional and longitudinal study. *System*, 125, 103438. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103438>
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2019). *IBM SPSS statistics 26 step by step: A simple guide and reference* (16th ed.). Routledge.
- Goldstein, K. (1939). *The organism: A holistic approach to biology derived from pathological data in man*. American Book Publishing.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ?* Bantam Books.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Hall, S. (1990). The emergence of cultural studies and the crisis of the humanities. *October*, 53(6), 11–23.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs “identity”? In S. Hall & P. D. Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*. Sage Publications.
- Hocher, A. P., Demydova, Y., Bereziuk, O., Varchenko, Y., & Ralko, M. (2024). Emotional intelligence and features of self-actualization of the individual in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war 2014–2023: Attempts at scientific reflection. *Synesis*, 16(1), 1–24.
- Javaid, Z. K., Nubashar, M., Mahmood, K., Noor, A., Javed, N., Akhtar, K., & Ali, A. L. (2024). Effect of emotional intelligence and self-concept on academic performance: A systematic review of cross-cultural research. *Bulletin of Business and Economics*, 13(2), 189–199. <https://doi.org/10.61506/01.00315>
- Jones, A., & Crandall, R. (1986). Validation of a short index of self-actualization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 12(1), 63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167286121007>
- Khaleghi, A. (2016). Identification of affective factors influencing students' low participation in university EFL oral class: An Iranian case study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(7), 185–189.
- Kaiser, H. F. (1974). An index of factorial simplicity. *Psychometrika*, 39(1), 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02291575>

- Kline, R. B. (2016). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (4th ed.). Guilford Press.
- Kumar, N., Liu, Z., & Hossain, M. Y. (2020). Examining the relationship between self-actualization and job performance via taking charge. *International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science*, 9(5), 74–83. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v9i5.858>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2015). Syng what we mean: Making a case for language acquisition to become language development. *Language Teaching*, 48(4), 491–505. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444814000019>
- Lieb, M. M. (2019). Investigating the relationship between cultural dimensions of learning and English language proficiency. *TESL-EJ*, 24(2), 1–22.
- Li, C. (2019). A positive psychology perspective on Chinese EFL students' trait emotional intelligence, foreign language enjoyment and EFL learning achievement. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(3), 246–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1614187>
- Ma, R., Abdullah, M., & Shuhaily, M. (2024). The role of cultural identity in English language learning in China. *Lecture Notes on Language and Literature*, 7(2), 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.23977/langl.2024.070208>
- MacCann, C., Fogarty, G. J., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. D. (2011). Coping mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic achievement. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 36(1), 60–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2010.11.002>
- Maehr, M. L., & Nicholls, J. G. (1980). Culture and achievement Motivation: A second look. In N. Warren (Ed.), *Studies in cross-cultural psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 221-267). Academic Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being* (2nd ed.). Van Nostrand Company.
- Mirahmadi Kia, A., Razmjoo, S. A., & Afraz, S. (2021). Language proficiency and identity: Developing a structural equation modeling (SEM) of identity for Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching & Research*, 9(34), 81-101.
- Moghim, M. (2020). Exploring preferred achievement goal orientation of Iranian EFL learners and its relationship with learning strategies and academic achievement. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Translation Studies*, 5(1), 67-84. <https://doi.org/10.22034/efl.2020.225324.1028>
- Mohammadi, H., & Izadpanah, S. (2019). A study of the relationship between Iranian learners' sociocultural identity and English as a foreign language (EFL) learning proficiency. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(1), 53-68. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.1214a>
- Mohammadi, K., Samavi, A., & Ghazavi, Z. (2016). The relationship between attachment styles and lifestyle with marital satisfaction. *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal*, 18(4), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.5812/ircmj.23839>
- Mohammadi Ghavam, M., Rastegar, M., & Razmi, M. (2011). Iranian EFL learners' achievement goals in relation with their metacognitive reading strategy use. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 1(2), 39-44. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2011.12006>

- Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: Conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review*, 91(3), 328–346. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.91.3.328>
- Ng'ang'a, M. W., Mwaura, P. A. M., & Dinga, J. N. (2018). Relationship between achievement goal orientation and academic achievement among form three students in Kiambu County, Kenya. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 6(4), 53-68.
- Ordun, G., & Akun, A. (2017). Self actualization, self efficacy and emotional intelligence of undergraduate students. *Journal of Advanced Management Science*, 5(3), 170-175. <https://doi.org/10.18178/joams.5.3.170-175>
- Pausanos, M. C. (2014). Emotional intelligence as predictor of self-actualization. *University of Bohol Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2(1), 32-43. <https://doi.org/10.15631/ubmrj.v2i1.13>
- Peng, A., & Patterson, M. M. (2021). Relations among cultural identity, motivation for language learning, and perceived English language proficiency for international students in the United States. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 35(1), 67–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2021.1938106>
- Pope, D., Roper, C., & Qualter, P. (2012). The influence of emotional intelligence on academic progress and achievement in UK university students. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 37(8), 907-918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.583981>
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40(3), 879-891. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.40.3.879>
- Rastegar, M., & Al-Sadat Fatemi, M. (2017). The interplay of self-actualization, creativity, emotional intelligence, language and academic achievement in gifted high school students. *International Journal of Psychology*, 11(1), 98-122.
- Rashidi, N., & Mansurian, M. (2015). The impact of identity aspects on EFL learners' achievement in Iranian academic context. *Teaching English Language*, 9(2), 75-96. <https://doi.org/10.22132/tel.2015.53725>
- Robinson, J., & Biran, M. (2006). Discovering self: Relationships between African identity and academic achievement. *Journal of Black Studies*, 37(1), 46-68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934704273149>
- Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory*. Houghton-Mifflin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy* (2nd ed.). Houghton Mifflin.
- Rust, J. P. (2008). Biculturalism, cultural identity, self-esteem, and academic achievement of African-American high school students. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 69(2), 519.
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185-211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
- Schreiber, J. B., Nora, A., Stage, F. K., Barlow, E. A., & King, J. (2006). Reporting structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis results: A review. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99(6), 323-338. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.99.6.323-338>
- Schumacker, R. E., & Lomax, R. G. (2016). *A beginner's guide to structural equation modeling* (4th ed.). Routledge.

- Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Hall, L. E., Haggerty, D. J., Cooper, J. T., Golden, C. J., & Dornheim, L. (1998). Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25(2), 167–177. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(98\)00001-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00001-4)
- Shehzad, M. O. (2019). Achievement goals and academic achievement: The mediating role of learning strategies. *Foundation University Journal of Psychology*, 3(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.33897/fujp3.11>
- ShirzadMoghaddam, E., & Ghapanchi, Z. (2018). On the relationship between multiple intelligences and self-actualization among Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 7(3), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsl.2017.1827>
- Solaja, O. M. (2015). Exploring the impact of employees' self-actualization on organizational performance in Nigerian investment company. *Sky Journal of Business Administration and Management*, 3(4), 25-31.
- Soodmand Afshar, H., & Karbakhsh Ravari, R. (2017). An investigation into the relationship among Iranian EFL learner's emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, strategy use and second language achievement. *PROCEEDINGS of the 15th International TELLSI Conference* (pp. 1-14). TELLSI.
- Shyr, W.-J., Feng, H.-Y., Zeng, L.-W., Hsieh, Y.-M., & Shih, C.-Y. (2017). The relationship between language learning strategies and achievement goal orientations from Taiwanese engineering students in EFL learning. *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics Science and Technology Education*, 13(10), 6431-6443. <https://doi.org/10.12973/ejmste/76660>
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2019). *Using multivariate statistics* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Taheri, H., Sadighi, F., Bagheri, M. S., & Bavali, M. (2019). EFL learners' L2 achievement and its relationship with cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, learning styles and language learning strategies. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1655882>
- Taherkhani, R., & Karbakhsh Ravari, R. (2018). Cultural intelligence, cultural identity, autonomy, self-Efficacy and second language achievement of Iranian EFL learners: A path analysis. *Applied Research on English Language*, 7(4), 435-456. <https://doi.org/10.22108/are.2018.111987.1324>
- Thorndike, E. L. (1920). Intelligence and its uses. *Harper's Magazine*, 140(5), 227-235.
- Torabi, S. (2020). The relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill, self-actualization and creativity. *Anatolian Journal of Education*, 5(1), 91-104. <https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2020.519a>
- Urrieta Jr, L. (2010). *Working from within: Chicana and Chicano activist educators in whitestream schools*. The University of Arizona Press.
- Usborne, E., & Taylor, D. M. (2010). The role of cultural identity clarity for self-concept clarity, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(7), 883–897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210372215>
- Vaughn, L. M., Naylor, S., & White, S. J. (2009). Relationship of attachment style and ethnic identity to self-actualization in college students. *Journal of College and Character*, 4(6), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1454>

- West, S. G., Finch, J. F., & Curran, P. J. (1995). Structural equation models with non-normal variables: Problems and remedies. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Structural equation modeling: Concepts, issues, and applications* (pp. 56–75). Sage Publications.
- Zayed, J., & Al-Ghamdi, H. (2019). The relationships among affective factors in learning EFL: A study of the Saudi setting. *English Language Teaching*, 12(9), 105-121. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n9p105>
- Zhang, H., Dai, Y., & Wang, Y. (2020). Motivation and second foreign language proficiency: The mediating role of foreign language enjoyment. *Sustainability*, 12(4), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12041302>