Exploring the Role of Loving Pedagogy in Reducing Learned Helplessness and Boredom: Perspectives from Female Students and Teachers in Iranian EFL Classrooms

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Abstract
In Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) contexts, fostering students' emotional engagement is vital to overcoming challenges like learned helplessness and boredom. This mixed-methods study, conducted with female senior high school students in Alborz, Iran, investigates the role of 'loving pedagogy' in addressing these emotional and motivational barriers. The research involved administering three questionnaires to 110 students (ages 15-18) and conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers. Findings reveal that key elements of loving pedagogy, including kindness, forgiveness, and teacher-student bonding, significantly reduce boredom and moderately address learned helplessness. These results underscore the importance of emotional support in fostering student engagement and resilience in EFL contexts. Practical recommendations for integrating loving pedagogy into teacher training programs are provided.

Introduction

The concept of 'loving pedagogy', first introduced by Loreman (2011) and expanded by Wang et al. (2021), presents an educational approach that emphasizes compassion,

empathy, and a student-centered perspective. This pedagogical framework comprises nine key emotional constructs: passion, kindness, empathy, intimacy, bonding, sacrifice, forgiveness, acceptance, and community. Characterized by sensitivity to students' emotional and educational needs, loving pedagogy fosters their holistic growth (Zhao & Li, 2021). Within the field of applied linguistics, Wang et al. (2021) argue that loving pedagogy represents an essential yet under-explored dimension of positive psychology, particularly relevant for fostering supportive language learning environments. Language learning, inherently interactive, is fundamentally an emotional process (Richards, 2022). The 'affective turn' in second language acquisition (SLA), as emphasized by Pavlenko (2013), signifies a crucial shift in emphasis towards comprehending the essential role of emotions, motivation, and affective factors in language learning. This perspective contests the traditional view of language acquisition as merely a cognitive process, highlighting its profound relationship to learners' emotional experiences. This paradigm shift has progressively acknowledged the significance of emotions as fundamental to learning outcomes (Pavlenko, 2013; Prior, 2019). Loving pedagogy, therefore, is closely linked to nurturing positive teacher-student relationships, cultivating an empathetic understanding, and establishing an inclusive classroom climate (Noddings, 2005).

Recent advancements in positive psychology emphasize the centrality of emotional well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer, 2021). These studies advocate for pedagogical approaches that nurture empathy and inclusivity, yet few have explored their application in secondary EFL classrooms, particularly within culturally specific contexts such as Iran. In the language learning context, students are often vulnerable to negative emotional states such as boredom and learned helplessness, both of which can hinder academic performance and reduce student agency. Learned helplessness (LH) is a state where students feel disconnected from the outcomes of their efforts, undermining their motivation and sense of control (Ghasemi, 2022). Educators and their chosen pedagogical approaches play a crucial role in addressing learned helplessness, as research indicates they can positively impact students' perceptions and agency (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021). Similarly, classroom conditions heavily influence experiences of boredom, which can be intentionally modified to reduce its detrimental effects (Nett et al., 2011). Boredom, whether a recurring personal trait or a transient state, disrupts learning by causing disengagement from educational activities (Daniels et al., 2015). Although often less visible than emotions like anxiety or frustration, boredom is common among secondary school students and has notable consequences for their educational outcomes (Furlong et al., 2021; Pekrun et al., 2010). These negative affective states are linked to suboptimal learning experiences and outcomes (Furlong et al., 2021; Gacek et al., 2017; Ghasemi, 2022; Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2010).

Although previous research has explored boredom and learned helplessness in university-level EFL learners (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Özgan Sucu & Bulut, 2019), there is limited understanding of how these affective states manifest in secondary education, particularly among female students in conservative cultural settings. This study seeks to address this gap.

This study aims to examine the influence of loving pedagogy on learned helplessness and boredom among female senior high school students in Alborz, Iran. By investigating these dynamics, this research intends to shed light on the potential of compassionate teaching methods to create a nurturing and empowering educational environment that enhances academic achievement, emotional well-being, and engagement with learning. Findings from this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for educators, school administrators, and policymakers to develop more supportive English as a foreign language (EFL) learning spaces.

Review of the Related Literature

The exploration of love in education has a long-standing theoretical foundation but remains under-researched empirically, especially within Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Early educators like Ascham and Locke highlighted love's transformative impact on learning, yet empirical investigations substantiating this influence remain scarce in contemporary scholarship. This gap is particularly evident regarding affective states such as boredom and learned helplessness among female senior high school students.

Emerging research highlights the role of social-emotional learning (SEL) in enhancing teacher efficacy and student engagement in diverse EFL settings (Pentón Herrera, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Positive emotions and well-being significantly impact life beyond educational contexts, and they are essential in determining the quality of life, well-being, and learning experiences for students as well as teachers within schools (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer, 2021). According to Miller and Gkonou (2018), by adopting a pedagogy of caring that was firmly anchored in their agency potentials, educators in the US and the UK were able to turn their emotional work into emotional rewards. A recent study by Kamali and Nazari (2024) demonstrates that educators' emotions, agency, and institutional support significantly influence student engagement and motivation. Tao et al. (2024), who discovered that teachers' versatile temperaments were crucial in forming their agency, especially when it came to adjusting to the difficulties of online instruction, lend more credence to this viewpoint.

In his 2020 paper, Pentón Herrera posits that teaching constitutes a moral act and argues that SEL holds significant relevance in TESOL. He states that students cannot

achieve academic success when confronted with challenges such as fear, hunger, discrimination, or emotional turmoil, including depression or the risk of familial separation or deportation. He contends that the principal objective of SEL is to enhance students' mental and emotional health, which are critically important to their overall well-being and success.

Chen (2023) emphasizes the significance of loving pedagogical dispositions in mitigating teacher burnout and enhancing well-being. Incorporating such features into teacher training can enhance educators' self-efficacy and resilience. This method cultivates a conducive environment which increases teacher efficacy and overall well-being. Dispositions toward loving pedagogy (DTLP) refers to educators' concern, sensitivity, and empathy about their students' development, needs, and experiences (Zhao & Li, 2021). A literature analysis indicates that DTLP significantly influences both learners' positive outcomes and instructors' well-being (e.g., Atmaca et al., 2020; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Li & Miao, 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Given that student L2 achievement is the paramount goal in all language education contexts, various research studies have examined the influence of students' personal attributes on their language learning success. Ye et al. (2022) underscore the essential importance of teachers' organizational commitment and loving pedagogy in improving students' L2 achievement. These factors give teachers the tools they need to create a cohesive and supportive learning space, which encourages active participation in class activities and, in the long run, improves language learning outcomes. Theoretical contributions from scholars like Dowling (2014) and Manning-Morton and Thorp (2015) have advanced the understanding of love's role in supporting students' social and emotional growth. However, these frameworks often lack empirical grounding, particularly regarding the distinct emotional obstacles faced by female TEFL learners. More recent studies, such as those by Jones and Bouffard (2012) and Loreman (2011), have begun to address this gap by linking nurturing teacher-student relationships to increased motivation and engagement. Still, these studies have not thoroughly explored how loving pedagogy may alleviate negative emotions like boredom and learned helplessness, nor have they focused on the unique experiences of female students in TEFL contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love, which identifies passion, intimacy, and commitment as core components. These constructs are operationalized within the context of loving pedagogy to examine their impact on emotional barriers to language learning, such as boredom and learned helplessness. In an educational setting, these components can serve as foundational elements of a

loving pedagogy. Passion, as both a motivating force in knowledge acquisition and a driver of pedagogical enthusiasm, is critical for engaging students (Cho, 2005; Sternberg, 1986). Kindness and empathy further support this model; kindness fosters positive interpersonal connections (Binfet & Gaertner, 2015; Willard, 1929), and empathy enables teachers to understand and respond to students' needs (Batson et al., 2007; Warren, 2018). Intimacy, encompassing close teacher-student bonds, helps to build a supportive and resilient classroom environment (Yin et al., 2019). Elements of sacrifice and forgiveness, such as teachers dedicating extra time to students, reflect their commitment and capacity to effect positive change (Loreman, 2011; Maio et al., 2008; Peterson, 2006). By fostering a classroom culture of community and acceptance, loving pedagogy creates a space where students feel valued and connected (Loreman, 2011; Yin et al., 2019), contributing to both emotional well-being and academic achievement.

Applying Sternberg's triangular theory to TEFL settings may offer a powerful approach to addressing negative emotions like boredom and learned helplessness. Passionate teaching, marked by enthusiasm for the subject, can revitalize the classroom dynamic, potentially mitigating boredom—a common source of student disengagement and apathy (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Goetz et al., 2014). Intimacy, through close teacher-student relationships, cultivates a sense of belonging and can counteract the detachment that contributes to boredom (Fahlman, 2009; Lewinski, 2015). Moreover, a teacher's commitment to student success may help alleviate learned helplessness by encouraging students to reclaim a sense of control and agency in their educational experiences. Such a dedicated approach from teachers can address the motivational, cognitive, and emotional deficits associated with learned helplessness (Alloy & Seligman, 1979; Hall et al., 2008; Raps et al., 1982).

This study hypothesizes that incorporating elements of loving pedagogy can create a more engaging and emotionally supportive TEFL environment, potentially reducing boredom and learned helplessness among learners. Through an analysis of the current literature and a critical identification of its limitations, this research seeks to advance understanding of how loving pedagogy can impact student emotions in TEFL. The study's research questions are designed to investigate the extent of boredom and learned helplessness in this context, examine the classroom dynamics contributing to these emotions, and evaluate the potential of loving pedagogy to foster a positive emotional climate.

Methodology
By investigating the potential of loving pedagogy to mitigate boredom and learned helplessness, this research aspires to make practical contributions to TEFL, offering

actionable insights for educators committed to creating emotionally supportive and engaging learning environments. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the relationship between loving pedagogy practices and the emotional well-being of female senior high school students in Alborz, Iran. The study's central research questions are:

RQ₁: What levels of boredom and learned helplessness are reported by female senior high school students?
RQ₂: How do female English language teachers integrate elements of loving pedagogy into their instructional practices?
RQ₃: Which aspects of EFL teachers' attitudes toward loving pedagogy are most significantly associated with students' levels of boredom in the classroom?
RQ₄: Which aspects of teachers' loving pedagogy practices are most significantly associated with students' levels of learned helplessness?
RQ₅: In what ways does loving pedagogy affect EFL learners' feelings of boredom and learned helplessness in language classes?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of how loving pedagogy can transform the TEFL classroom into a more engaging and supportive space for students. This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between loving pedagogy and the emotional challenges of boredom and learned helplessness among female senior high school students in Alborz province, Iran. Mixed-methods research (MMR) enables researchers to generate more comprehensive inferences by integrating the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, as Riazi and Candlin (2014) assert. The mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative rigor with qualitative depth, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between teacher practices and student emotions (Dörnyei, 2007). This design is particularly suitable for capturing the nuanced effects of loving pedagogy on affective states. This methodology combined quantitative and qualitative data collection to ensure a robust exploration of these phenomena, with quantitative data provided through structured surveys and qualitative insights obtained through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews.

Research Context and Participants
The research was conducted within the Alborz province, Iran, focusing on a sample of female senior high school students and their English language teachers. The student sample comprised 110 female students aged 15 to 18, representing three academic tracks: mathematics and physics, experimental sciences, and literature and humanities. The teacher sample included 17 female English language teachers actively teaching in the same schools. Table 1 breaks down the demographic profile of the

teachers involved in this study, encompassing their highest educational qualifications, years of teaching experience, and age range. Their identities have been defined using individual identification numbers (T1, T2, T3, etc.), therefore preserving anonymity while preventing frequent mention of teachers' names.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Teachers

Teacher ID	Highest Educational Attainment	Years of Experience	Age Range (Years)
T1	Doctoral Degree	10	35-40
T2	Master's Degree	10	35-40
T3	Master's Degree	9	25-30
T4	Master's Degree	10	25-30
T5	Bachelor's Degree	6	30-35
T6	Master's Degree	15	40-45
T7	Master's Degree	20	40-45
T8	Doctoral Degree	12	30-35
T9	Doctoral Degree	3	20-25
T10	Bachelor's Degree	5	30-35
T11	Master's Degree	14	35-40
T12	Bachelor's Degree	24	45-50
T13	Bachelor's Degree	20	45-50
T14	Doctoral Degree	6	25-30
T15	Master's Degree	10	30-35
T16	Master's Degree	2	35-40
T17	Master's Degree	6	25-30

Convenience sampling, as described by Dörnyei (2007), is the most common type of sample used in second language research and involves choosing members of the target population based on practical factors like proximity, availability, accessibility, or willingness to volunteer. This method was employed in several districts across Alborz province to make the study easier to access and carry out. Both student and teacher participants provided insights essential for exploring the dynamics of loving pedagogy in this context.

Instruments

Three distinct surveys were used to collect quantitative data on boredom, learned helplessness, and teachers' dispositions towards loving pedagogy. These surveys were complemented by qualitative interviews designed to capture teachers' perspectives on implementing loving pedagogy. To ensure academic integrity and avoid plagiarism, the questions in the questionnaires were paraphrased while

retaining their original meaning and intent. For reference, Appendices 1, 2, and 3 provide these items in their original versions.

Boredom scale
The study adapted the Boredom Scale, based on Kruk and Zawodniak (2017), to measure students' boredom levels in second language (L2) classes. This revised scale consists of 23 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale (Appendix 1), assessing boredom's frequency and intensity (Pawlak et al., 2020). The scale was translated into Persian, the participants' first language, for clarity, with internal consistency reliability verified for the study sample.

Learned helplessness scale
To assess learned helplessness (LH) among students, this research employed the scale developed by Quinless and Nelson (1988). Modified for the educational context and validated by Ghasemi (2022), this 20-item scale uses a five-point Likert response format and was also translated into Persian to maximize participant comprehension and ensure reliability within the study context. (Appendix 2).

Disposition towards loving pedagogy (DTLP) scale
Adapted from Loreman's (2011) Loving Pedagogy Scales, this 29-item instrument measures teachers' attitudes and practices related to loving pedagogy, with key elements consolidated into six factors (Yin et al., 2019). Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale, covering aspects such as empathy, acceptance, community, and commitment. Additionally, four open-ended questions accompanied this scale to allow teachers to elaborate on their beliefs and strategies for addressing boredom and learned helplessness through loving pedagogy.

Semi-structured interviews
The qualitative component included semi-structured interviews with teachers, covering their conceptualizations and implementations of loving pedagogy. Questions explored definitions of loving pedagogy, specific practices of empathy and care, observed experiences of student boredom and learned helplessness, and methods to mitigate these challenges. This approach enriched the data, providing context to the quantitative findings.

Data Collection

Data were collected through online surveys administered via Google Forms, which allowed efficient data management and broad accessibility. Surveys on boredom and learned helplessness were distributed to student participants, while the DTLP Scale and accompanying open-ended questions were administered to teachers.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted to gain deeper insights into their approaches to loving pedagogy and its impact on student engagement and emotional well-being.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed to evaluate levels of boredom and learned helplessness among students, addressing Research Question 1. Correlational analyses examined relationships between classroom factors and students' boredom and learned helplessness levels, while multiple regression analyses identified the specific elements of loving pedagogy (e.g., empathy, kindness) that best predicted reductions in these emotional challenges (Research Questions 3 and 4).

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic content analysis was applied to the qualitative data, derived from both interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses. This analysis identified recurring themes, such as the importance of teacher-student relationships, inclusivity, and student autonomy, which were then explored in relation to students' boredom and learned helplessness (Research Questions 2 and 5). Themes were synthesized to develop a nuanced understanding of how elements of loving pedagogy might influence students' emotional states and engagement.

This mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation, strengthening the findings through both statistical inference and rich qualitative insights. The integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a comprehensive examination of the relationship between loving pedagogy, learned helplessness, and boredom among female senior high school students in an Iranian EFL context.

Ethical Considerations

Ary et al. (2019) assert that, due to the involvement of human subjects in educational research, researchers bear an ethical obligation to safeguard the privacy and security of study participants. Consequently, ethical approval was secured from all teachers and students involved in the research in Alborz, and all participants granted informed consent. Student anonymity was guaranteed through the assignment of codes, and data were securely archived.

Results

Research Question 1: Levels of Boredom and Learned Helplessness

To address Research Question 1, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the reported levels of boredom and learned helplessness among female senior high school students, as measured by the Boredom Scale and the Learned Helplessness Scale. Summary statistics—including means, medians, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores—are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Boredom and Learned Helplessness

		boredom	learned helplessness
N	Valid		110
Mean		80.86	69.90
Median		74.50	66.00
Std. Deviation		29.87	27.19
Range		138.00	120.00
Minimum		23.00	20.00
Maximum		161.00	140.00

The mean boredom score was 80.86 (SD = 29.87), suggesting moderate to high boredom levels among students, with a median score of 74.50. Scores ranged from 23.00 to 161.00, indicating substantial variability in boredom experiences. Similarly, the mean score for learned helplessness was 69.90 (SD = 27.19), reflecting moderate learned helplessness levels, with a median score of 66.00 and a range from 20.00 to 140.00. These findings demonstrate that students' experiences of boredom and learned helplessness varied widely, with some reporting minimal feelings and others experiencing significant levels.

Next, frequency distributions and percentages were calculated to classify students' boredom and learned helplessness levels as low, moderate, or high. The ranges for each classification were determined by dividing the total score range into three equal intervals. Table 3 provides an overview of how the students perceived boredom in the classroom.

Table 3

Distribution of Participants by Level of Boredom

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	High	24	21.8
	Low	42	38.2
	Moderate	44	40.0
	Total	110	100.0

Among the participants, 21.8% reported high levels of boredom, suggesting frequent disinterest in classroom activities. The largest proportion, 40%, experienced moderate boredom, indicating occasional disengagement. A further 38.2% reported low boredom levels, implying limited disengagement in their classes. This distribution suggests that while a substantial portion of students feel some boredom, a notable percentage remain engaged. For learned helplessness, similar classifications were made based on score ranges. Table 4 provides an overview of how students perceived learned helplessness in the classroom.

Table 4

*Distribution of Participants by Level of Learned Helplessness*

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	High	22	20.0
	Low	43	39.1
	Moderate	45	40.9
	Total	110	100.0

Twenty percent of students reported high levels of learned helplessness, indicating they often felt unable to improve academically. The majority (40.9%) experienced moderate learned helplessness, while 39.1% reported low levels, suggesting a relatively confident approach to learning. Overall, these findings reveal a broad spectrum of experiences, with most students reporting low to moderate levels of both boredom and learned helplessness.

Figure 1 (shown below) depicts the distribution of participants' levels of boredom and learned helplessness within the classroom setting. The data indicates that 40% of students had moderate boredom, 38.18% reported low boredom, and 21.82% indicated extreme boredom levels. In terms of learned helplessness, 40.91% of students exhibited moderate levels, 39.09% shown low levels, and 20% displayed extreme levels. These findings emphasize the frequency of moderate levels of both emotional states, while also highlighting the necessity of addressing the elevated levels of boredom and helplessness experienced by a smaller yet significant subset of students. While high levels of boredom were reported by 21.8% of students, the qualitative interviews revealed that repetitive tasks and lack of variety were primary contributors. This aligns with prior research emphasizing task design in mitigating boredom (Pawlak et al., 2020).

Figure 1

Distribution of the Participants based on Their Level of Boredom and Learned Helplessness
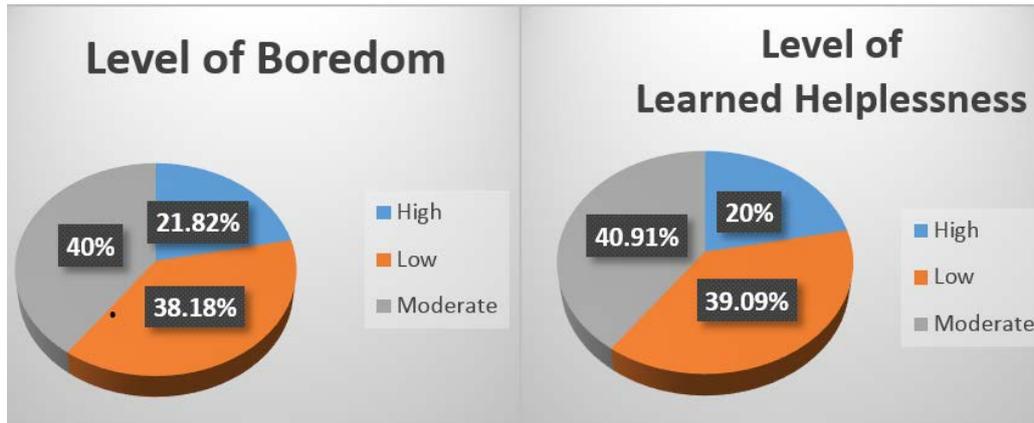
Research Question 2: Integration of Loving Pedagogy into Teachers' Instructional Practices

Research Question 2 examined how female English language teachers integrated elements of loving pedagogy in their teaching practices. Descriptive statistics for teachers' responses regarding their self-perceived integration of loving pedagogy are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Teacher Self-Perceptions of Acceptance of Diversity and Classroom Community

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1. Every hour, as part of my teaching, I make it a point to do good deeds for my students.	3.17	.808	17
22. Every student, regardless of their distinct differences, is welcome in my classroom.	3.64	.492	17
23. I take part in classroom activities designed especially to help students appreciate diversity.	3.41	.618	17
24. I recognize minority cultural holidays in my classroom even if my region has no official holidays.	3.35	.492	17
25. I welcome students with significant disabilities to my classroom.	3.23	.664	17
26. Even if the resources available to support this area are insufficient, I remain dedicated to teaching all students with a variety of backgrounds and skill levels.	3.41	.618	17
27. It is essential for students to engage directly with individuals from countries and settings with which they have had limited prior exposure.	3.35	.492	17
28. foster social cohesion in the classroom by implementing specific activities that demonstrate the interdependence of students and staff.	3.11	.485	17
29. Students have substantial control over how our classroom is conducted, and they play a key part in establishing routines and standards.	3.05	.747	17

Teachers expressed strong agreement on inclusivity, with the highest mean scores reflecting that they welcome all students, promote diversity, and support a positive

classroom community. There was slightly less frequent engagement in daily kind acts and social cohesion activities, as well as lower levels of student involvement in rule-setting. Overall, responses indicate a strong commitment to diversity and support in the classroom environment.

Additional analysis of other factors related to loving pedagogy, such as intimacy, bonding, deliberate kindness, and forgiveness, is presented in subsequent tables 6-10, revealing moderate agreement in areas involving physical expressions of intimacy, teacher-student bonding, and the importance of kindness. The findings suggest that teachers generally value a nurturing environment but vary in their comfort levels regarding physical expressions and personal sacrifices for students. The results also reflect a consensus on fostering forgiveness and kindness, highlighting the importance of creating a supportive and empathetic classroom atmosphere.

Table 6

Item Statistics for the Second Factor: Issues of Intimacy

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
7. If a student wants to embrace me on occasion, that is fine.	3.00	.935	17
8. When it feels right, I use appropriate touch to comfort students who are upset or hurt.	3.23	.752	17
9. It is permissible for young pupils to briefly hold my hand during playground supervision.	2.82	.808	17
10. I accept suitable forms of intimacy amongst students in my classroom (for example, a happy hug for a special achievement).	3.17	.727	17
11. It is crucial for me to establish a strong emotional bond with my students.	3.17	.808	17
19. Asking for and giving forgiveness is something I encourage students to do.	3.17	.528	17

Table 7

Item Statistics for the Third Factor: Bonding and Sacrifice

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
6. To build empathy among students, I spend considerable periods of time with them individually or in small groups.	2.88	.781	17
12. I make special attempts to connect with my students.	3.35	.492	17
13. Working one-on-one with each student, I participate in an active student-teacher learning collaboration.	3.29	.587	17
15. In my classes, I implement particular exercises designed to foster student bonding.	3.35	.606	17
16. Occasionally, I make significant sacrifices for my students, such as allocating a portion of my personal funds to classroom events and making use of my free time to provide assistance.	2.70	.771	17
17. I intentionally make small everyday sacrifices for my pupils, like lending a hand when they're having trouble during a break.	3.17	.528	17
18. If there is a better way to reach the same goal without making a sacrifice, I will do that.	3.17	.392	17

Table 8

Item Statistics for the Fourth Factor: Deliberate Kind Acts in Teaching and Familiarity with Students

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
2. As a teacher, I make it a point to do nice things for my students every day.	3.41	.618	17
3. As part of my job as a teacher, I choose to do nice things with my pupils once a week.	3.35	.701	17
14. I attempt to get to know each of my students more closely.	3.76	.437	17

Table 9

Item Statistics for the Fifth Factor: Forgiveness

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
20. Regardless of what the student has done, they should be forgiven if they ask for it.	3.17	.808	17
21. I am obligated to forgive students who beg for it.	3.47	.624	17

Table 10

Item Statistics for the Sixth Factor: Value Placed on Kindness in the Pedagogical Context

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
4. Demonstrating kindness towards students is paramount to me.	3.64	.492	17
5. It is crucial that all adults and children in my classroom exhibit kindness toward one another.	3.47	.514	17

These findings collectively indicate that students' experiences of boredom and learned helplessness vary widely, and teachers place a high value on inclusivity, diversity, and kindness within the classroom.

Research Question 3: Association Between Teachers' Loving Pedagogy Attitudes and Students' Levels of Boredom

The third research question aimed to identify specific elements of loving pedagogy that correlate with students' self-reported levels of boredom, measured through the Boredom Scale. To examine these relationships, a correlation analysis assessed how different aspects of teachers' loving pedagogy related to students' boredom scores.

Before conducting the main statistical tests, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to verify the normality of the factors linked to teachers' loving pedagogy, as well as the total loving pedagogy score, boredom, and learned helplessness. Table 11 presents these normality test results.

Table 11

Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test for Factors Related to Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Student Outcomes

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Factor 1: Acceptance of diversity and classroom community	.918	17	.136
Factor 2: Issues of intimacy	.947	17	.410
Factor 3: Bonding and sacrifice	.935	17	.265
Factor 4: Deliberate kind acts in teaching and familiarity with students	.891	17	.049
Factor 5: Forgiveness	.869	17	.021
Factor 6: Value placed on kindness in the pedagogical context	.812	17	.003
Total Loving Pedagogy	.958	17	.602
Boredom	.969	17	.793
Learned Helplessness	.971	17	.827

As indicated in Table 11, all factors of loving pedagogy, total loving pedagogy, boredom, and learned helplessness scores showed non-significant p-values ($p > .001$). These results confirmed that the variables followed a normal distribution, enabling the use of parametric tests for further analysis. Table 12 displays the Pearson correlation analysis results.

Table 12

Pearson Correlation between Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Students' Level of Boredom

		Boredom
Factor 1: Acceptance of diversity and classroom community	Pearson Correlation	-.754**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Factor 2: Issues of intimacy	Pearson Correlation	-.845**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Factor 3: Bonding and sacrifice	Pearson Correlation	-.684**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	17
Factor 4: Deliberate kind acts in teaching and familiarity with students	Pearson Correlation	-.718**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	17
Factor 5: Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation	-.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Factor 6: Value placed on kindness in the pedagogical context	Pearson Correlation	-.923**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Total Loving Pedagogy	Pearson Correlation	-.939**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong negative relationships between all aspects of teachers' loving pedagogy and students' boredom levels, indicating that

higher perceptions of loving pedagogy aligned with reduced boredom in the classroom. Notably, Factor 5 (Forgiveness) had the strongest correlation with boredom (r = -.931, p = .000), while Factor 3 (Bonding and sacrifice) demonstrated the weakest significant relationship (r = -.684, p = .002). Furthermore, the total score for loving pedagogy strongly correlated with boredom (r = -.939, p = .000), suggesting that overall engagement in loving pedagogical practices was associated with lower boredom among students. Figure 2 visually represents the relationship between loving pedagogy and boredom levels.

Figure 2

The Relationship between Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Students' Level of Boredom
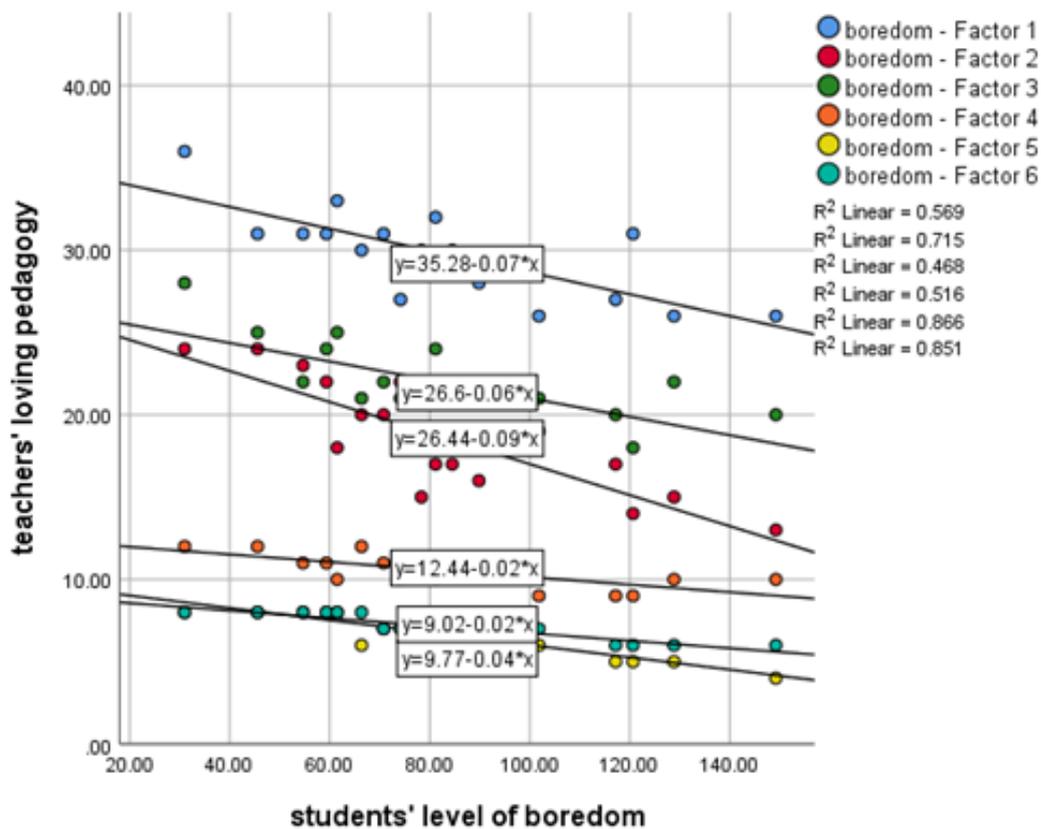
Figure 2 indicates that all elements of loving pedagogy, particularly forgiveness and kindness, were effective in creating an engaging classroom environment that decreased student boredom. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis identified which aspects of teachers' loving pedagogy best predicted students' boredom levels (see Table 13).

Table 13

Multiple Regression Analyses for Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Students' Level of Boredom

Model	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		15.217	.000					
Factor 1	-.218	-2.866	.017	-.754	-.672	-.142	.426	2.348
Factor 2	-.299	-3.438	.006	-.845	-.736	-.170	.325	3.075
Factor 3	.046	.620	.549	-.684	.193	.031	.454	2.201
Factor 4	-.119	-1.677	.124	-.718	-.469	-.083	.485	2.061
Factor 5	-.384	-3.615	.005	-.931	-.753	-.179	.217	4.600
Factor 6	-.159	-1.275	.231	-.923	-.374	-.063	.158	6.325

*Note: Factor 1: Acceptance of diversity; Factor 2: Issues of intimacy; Factor 3: Bonding and sacrifice; Factor 4: Deliberate kind acts in teaching and familiarity with students; Factor 5: Forgiveness; Factor 6: Value placed on kindness in the pedagogical context

The analysis confirmed no multicollinearity issues, as indicated by VIF values under 10 and tolerance values above 0.10 (Field, 2024). Among the factors, three emerged as significant predictors of boredom. Factor 5 (Forgiveness) was the strongest predictor (β = -.384, t = -3.615, p = .005), indicating that forgiveness significantly reduced students' boredom. Factor 2 (Issues of intimacy) followed (β = -.299, t = -3.438, p = .006), suggesting that appropriate emotional closeness with students helped lower boredom. Finally, Factor 1 (Acceptance of diversity and classroom community) demonstrated a moderate predictive effect (β = -.218, t = -2.866, p = .017). Conversely, Factors 3, 4, and 6, although significantly correlated with boredom, did not predict it in the regression model, likely due to their shared variance with stronger predictors.

In sum, the findings emphasize that forgiveness, intimacy, and classroom diversity significantly decrease students' boredom, with forgiveness emerging as the strongest predictor. This suggests that while all aspects of loving pedagogy contribute to reducing boredom, some elements are more impactful than others in sustaining student engagement.

Research Question 4: Association Between Teachers' Loving Pedagogy Practices and Students' Learned Helplessness

To examine the association between various aspects of teachers' loving pedagogy and students' levels of learned helplessness, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Pearson Correlation between Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Students' Level of Learned Helplessness

		Learned Helplessness
Factor 1: Acceptance of diversity and classroom community	Pearson Correlation	-.734**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	17
Factor 2: Issues of intimacy	Pearson Correlation	-.868**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Factor 3: Bonding and sacrifice	Pearson Correlation	-.693**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	17
Factor 4: Deliberate kind acts in teaching and familiarity with students	Pearson Correlation	-.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	17
Factor 5: Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation	-.921**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Factor 6: Value placed on kindness in the pedagogical context	Pearson Correlation	-.939**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17
Total loving pedagogy	Pearson Correlation	-.946**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	17

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between the overall loving pedagogy score and students' levels of learned helplessness ($r = -0.946$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that higher levels of loving pedagogy were associated with lower levels of learned helplessness among students. Factor 6 (Value placed on kindness in pedagogy) demonstrated the strongest negative correlation ($r = -0.939$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that when teachers placed significant emphasis on kindness, students were less likely to experience learned helplessness. Factor 5 (Forgiveness) also exhibited a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.921$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting forgiveness as an important factor in reducing students' learned helplessness. Factors 3 (Bonding and sacrifice) and 4 (Deliberate kind acts and familiarity with students) showed weaker yet significant correlations with learned helplessness, underscoring that each of the six factors contributed meaningfully to the overall association. Figure 3 illustrates the inverse relationship between each aspect of teachers' loving pedagogy and students' learned helplessness.

Figure 3

Relationship between Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Students' Learned Helplessness
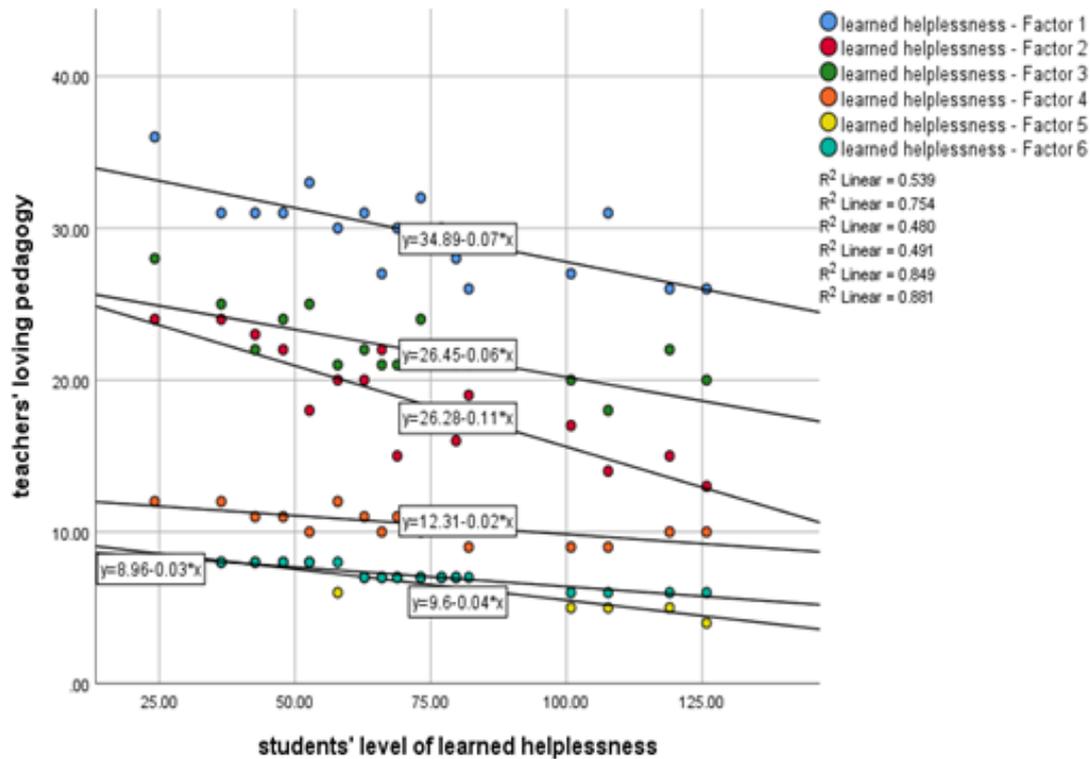
Following the correlation analysis, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with learned helplessness as the dependent variable and the six factors of loving pedagogy as independent variables. The regression results are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

Multiple Regression Analyses for Teachers' Loving Pedagogy and Students' Level of Learned Helplessness

Model		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		16.012	.000					
	Factor 1	-.187	-2.624	.025	-.734	-.639	-.122	.426	2.348
	Factor 2	-.328	-4.023	.002	-.868	-.786	-.187	.325	3.075
	Factor 3	.030	.430	.676	-.693	.135	.020	.454	2.201
	Factor 4	-.060	-.897	.391	-.701	-.273	-.042	.485	2.061
	Factor 5	-.293	-2.937	.015	-.921	-.681	-.137	.217	4.600
	Factor 6	-.282	-2.411	.037	-.939	-.606	-.112	.158	6.325

*Note: Factor 1: Acceptance of diversity and classroom community; Factor 2: Issues of intimacy; Factor 3: Bonding and sacrifice; Factor 4: Deliberate kind acts in teaching and teachers' familiarity with students; Factor 5: Forgiveness; Factor 6: Value placed on kindness in the pedagogical context

Collinearity diagnostics confirmed that multicollinearity was not a concern in this model (all VIF values < 10 and tolerance > 0.1), allowing for reliable interpretation of each predictor's impact on learned helplessness.

The regression results revealed that Factor 2 (Issues of intimacy) was the strongest predictor of students' learned helplessness (β = -0.328, t = -4.023, p = 0.002), indicating that teachers who fostered close relationships significantly reduced students' feelings of learned helplessness. Factor 5 (Forgiveness) was also a significant predictor (β = -0.293, t = -2.937, p = 0.015), suggesting that a forgiving teaching approach helps to lower students' learned helplessness. Factor 1 (Acceptance of diversity and classroom community) and Factor 6 (Value placed on kindness) were additional significant predictors, showing that diversity and kindness also contribute to mitigating learned helplessness. The significant correlation between forgiveness (Factor 5) and reduced boredom mirrors findings by Wang et al. (2022), highlighting the transformative potential of empathy-driven pedagogy.

In contrast, Factors 3 (Bonding and sacrifice) and 4 (Deliberate kind acts and familiarity with students) did not significantly predict learned helplessness in the regression analysis, despite having significant correlations in the Pearson analysis. This discrepancy suggests that while these factors are individually associated with learned helplessness, their predictive power decreases when other factors, such as intimacy and forgiveness, are taken into account in the model. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of teachers' loving pedagogy, with intimacy, forgiveness, kindness, and acceptance of diversity emerging as the most effective elements in reducing students' learned helplessness.

Research Question 5: Effects of Loving Pedagogy on EFL Learners' Boredom and Learned Helplessness
This study investigates how loving pedagogy shapes EFL learners' experiences of boredom and learned helplessness in high school language classes. To address this, we conducted interviews with seventeen experienced EFL teachers of female high school students, analyzing their insights using thematic content analysis. Teachers provided responses to open-ended questions on their approaches to integrating loving pedagogy, revealing key themes in their practices.

Teacher Perspectives on Loving Pedagogy
In the first interview item, teachers defined and described their perceptions of loving pedagogy within their classrooms. Many teachers emphasized that fostering positive relationships formed the foundation of their approach. They described loving pedagogy as creating an environment where students feel valued, respected, and

supported, which was achieved through empathy, attentiveness to students' well-being, and an inclusive classroom culture. Teachers emphasized practices such as active listening, emotional support, and empathy as central to building these strong relationships.

Ten teachers saw loving pedagogy as fostering inclusivity and acceptance, where students of all abilities feel welcomed. For some, loving pedagogy involved supporting both academic and personal growth by encouraging students to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from these experiences. T1 explained: "Loving pedagogy is creating a supportive learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves, share their thoughts, and take academic risks."

Mutual respect, trust, and collaboration were seen as vital, as teachers believed that empowering students to take responsibility and engage actively fosters a shared educational journey. Many stressed promoting autonomy, independence, and self-directed learning as integral to loving pedagogy.

Expressions of care and passion for teaching

In exploring how teachers expressed love and care for their students, responses highlighted a shared dedication to building meaningful relationships. Ten teachers noted that they showed care by understanding students' unique needs, providing guidance, and expressing empathy. Four of them (T1, T8, T9, & T14) created a safe learning environment, encouraged positive peer interactions, and offered personalized feedback. T10 shared: "I show my love for teaching by fostering my students' development. I always encourage them to explore new ideas and expand their views."

Most teachers emphasized being accessible, welcoming questions, and offering support outside of class. Additionally, some expressed a passion for professional growth, viewing their commitment to ongoing training as a way to enhance learning experiences.

Addressing learned helplessness and boredom

The interviews revealed that teachers identified learned helplessness through students' lack of motivation, frustration, and tendency to give up on challenging tasks, while boredom manifested as disengagement and inattentiveness. Teachers attributed these feelings to factors such as repetitive tasks, misalignment with student interests, and overly challenging or unengaging materials. Reflecting on these dynamics, T16 observed: "I've noticed instances where students are disengaged during class activities, particularly when tasks are repetitive or lack variety."

Teachers implemented varied strategies to combat these challenges, including interactive activities like group discussions, role-plays, and multimedia use, with teachers like T3, T9, T10, and T12 exemplifying these approaches in their classrooms. By providing assignment choices and adapting strategies to student feedback, teachers sought to empower students and maintain engagement.

Perceptions of loving pedagogy's impact on boredom and learned helplessness
The teachers believed loving pedagogy positively affected students' experiences of boredom and learned helplessness by cultivating a supportive, respectful, and engaging environment. Teachers reported that when students felt valued, they were more likely to actively participate and overcome feelings of disengagement. Many linked empathy-driven relationships with reduced feelings of learned helplessness and increased motivation. They suggested that aligning lessons with students' interests deepens engagement and reduces boredom. Teachers noted that relevance and purpose in tasks helped students stay motivated and reduced negative feelings. In the words of T2: "Loving pedagogy has a transformative effect on students' attitudes. When teachers show empathy and understanding, students feel motivated, engaged, and empowered to overcome boredom and learned helplessness."

Figure 4, titled 'Common Themes of the Interview Content,' demonstrates the critical role of loving pedagogy in promoting positive educational outcomes by addressing emotional challenges such as learned helplessness and boredom. This accentuates the importance of establishing a classroom environment that is supportive and empathetic, in which students feel valued, respected, and cared for. Key strategies consist of establishing a safe and inclusive environment, providing personalized guidance, and comprehending the unique requirements of each student. Additionally, the figure promotes the use of interactive activities and adaptable assignments as engaging instructional methods that mitigate monotony and encourage active participation. These results emphasize the extent to which loving pedagogy enhances both teacher effectiveness and student attitudes by fostering trust and reducing negative emotions.

Figure 4

Common Themes of the Interview Content
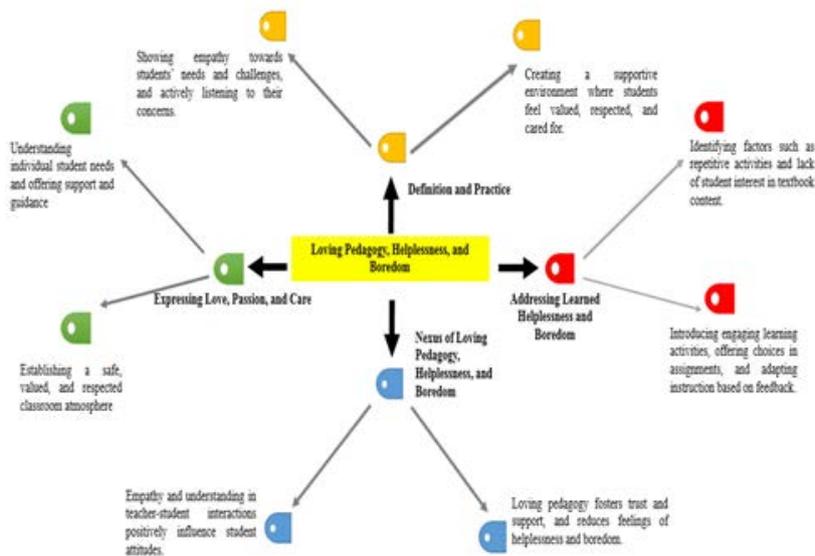
Discussion

This study offers valuable insights into how female EFL teachers incorporate elements of loving pedagogy into their classrooms and the notable presence of boredom and learned helplessness among female senior high school students. The findings reveal that a significant number of students experience moderate to high levels of these negative affective states, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to increase motivation and engagement. Addressing these emotional challenges is essential, as they directly impact both academic performance and students' overall well-being. Moreover, the study highlights the positive strides teachers are making by fostering inclusive, emotionally supportive environments where kindness, acceptance, and interpersonal relationships are central to their teaching philosophy. These findings resonate with previous research indicating that loving pedagogical approaches, such as DTLP, enhance learners' motivation, autonomy, and achievement, as well as teacher involvement and well-being (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Pentón Herrera (2024) posits that the data indicate SEL as an effective strategy for ELT practitioners to augment students' positive emotions and socio-emotional intelligence, hence fostering enhanced well-being.

Loving pedagogy, as demonstrated in this study, emerges as a promising approach to creating inclusive, emotionally supportive environments where kindness, acceptance, and constructive interpersonal relationships are prioritized. These findings align with the work of Noddings (2005) and Ghasemi and Karimi (2021), who emphasized the value of empathy and caring relationships in fostering positive learning experiences. Similarly, according to Li and Wang (2024), loving pedagogy is closely related to

teacher job satisfaction and professional success. Their findings indicate that loving pedagogy can significantly predict Chinese EFL teachers' job satisfaction and professional success. Additionally, loving pedagogy, as a profession-related factor, was identified as a valuable approach to enhancing teachers' effectiveness in Chinese EFL classrooms. This investigation provides valuable insights into the role of love in educational environments, highlighting its importance for professional success. It has been suggested that EFL teachers should adopt a love-centered approach to achieve greater success in their profession.

The strong correlation between loving pedagogy and enhanced academic experiences emphasizes the necessity for educators to adopt and refine strategies that support students' emotional well-being and mitigate disengagement. These findings suggest that implementing loving pedagogy in EFL contexts, and potentially in broader educational settings, may offer substantial benefits for student motivation, resilience, and academic achievement. Teacher training programs should incorporate modules on emotional intelligence and loving pedagogy. For example, role-playing exercises could help educators practice forgiveness and empathy in classroom scenarios. Additionally, policymakers should advocate for reduced class sizes to facilitate stronger teacher-student connections. This research promotes widespread adoption of loving pedagogy as an innovative approach to address the academic and emotional needs of learners. This study also contributes to the growing body of research on positive psychology in TEFL by offering empirical evidence of the effectiveness of loving pedagogy in secondary classrooms, a context that remains underexplored.

Conclusion

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited in scope to a specific demographic and geographic context, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings. The results of this investigation are subject to several limitations. The initial limitation is that the current research was conducted in Iran, which is classified as an EFL country. It is recommended that researchers conduct a comparable investigation in an ESL country, as the results of this inquiry may not be pertinent to countries that use English as a second language (ESL). Additionally, reliance on self-reported data presents potential biases. Future research should explore loving pedagogy in male-dominated classrooms to understand potential gender-specific effects. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the sustained impact of such interventions over time.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

Rights and Permissions

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire Items on Boredom
1. Time always seems to be passing slowly in my language classes.
2. I often find myself at loose ends in a language class.
3. I often have to do meaningless things in my language classes.
4. I always feel entertained in my English language classes.
5. I often have to do repetitive or monotonous things in my language classes.
6. It takes more stimulation to get me going in English classes than most students from my group.
7. I get a kick out of most things I do in a language class.
8. I am seldom excited about my English language classes.
9. I can usually find something interesting to do in my language classes.
10. I often do not feel like doing anything in English classes.
11. It would be very hard for me to find an exciting task in language classes.
12. I would like to have more challenging things to do in my English classes.
13. I feel that I am working below my abilities most of the time in my language classes.
14. I am more interested in other subjects than practical English classes.
15. If I am not doing something interesting/exciting during English classes I feel tired and bored.
16. It takes a lot of change and variety to keep me really satisfied during my English classes.
17. It seems that English classes are the same all the time; it is getting boring.
18. It is easy for me to concentrate on the activities in my English language classes.
19. During language classes, I often think about unrelated things.
20. Having to listen to my English language teachers present material bores me tremendously.
21. I actively participate in English classes.
22. Much of the time I just sit around doing nothing in my English language classes.
23. In situations where I have to wait (e.g., for everyone to finish their task), I get very restless.

Appendix 2. Questionnaire Items on Learned Helplessness
1. No matter how much energy I put into a task, I feel I have no control over the outcome
2. I feel that my own inability to solve problems is the cause of my failures.
3. I cannot find solutions to difficult problems.
4. I don't place myself in situations in which I cannot.
5. If I complete a task successfully, it is probably because I became lucky.
6. I do not have the ability to solve most of life's problems.
7. When I do not succeed at a task, I do not attempt any similar tasks because I feel that I will fail them also.
8. When something doesn't turn out the way I planned, I know it is because I didn't have the ability to start with.
9. Other people have more control over their success and/or failure than I do.
10. I do not try a new task if I have failed similar tasks in the past.
11. When I perform poorly it is because I don't have the ability to perform better.
12. I do not accept a task that I do not think I will succeed in.
13. I feel that I have little control over the outcomes of my work.
14. I am unsuccessful at most tasks I try.
15. I feel that anyone else could do better than me in most tasks.
16. I am unable to reach my goals in life.
17. When I don't succeed at a task, I find myself blaming my own stupidity for my failure.
18. No matter how hard I try, things never seem to work out the way I want them to.
19. I feel that my success reflects chance, not my ability.
20. My behavior does not seem to influence the success of a work group.

Appendix 3. Questionnaire Items on the Dispositions towards Loving Pedagogy
Factor One
DTLP38: I am committed to teaching all students with diverse abilities and backgrounds, even if the resource to support this area are inadequate.
DTLP37: Students with severe disabilities are welcomed in my classroom.
DTLP35: I engage in classroom activities specifically aimed at encouraging acceptance of diversity in students.
DTLP34: All students, no matter what their individual differences are, are welcomed in my classroom.
DTLP36: I recognize the significant events of minority cultures in my classroom even if there are no official holidays in my region.
DTLP39: It is important for students to have direct contact with people from cultures and settings they have had little prior experience with.
DTLP41: I build social cohesion in the classroom by undertaking specific activities that help students and staff see how much they rely on one another.
DTLP43: Students exercise a considerable amount of control over how our classroom is run including taking a major role in setting rules and routines.
DTLP1: I make a point of engaging in kind acts towards my students in the context of my teaching every hour.
Factor Two
DTLP12: It is OK for a student to hug me occasionally if they want.
DTLP13: I use appropriate touch to comfort students who are hurt or distressed when it feels natural to do so.
DTLP14: It is OK for young students to hold my hand for a short time during playground supervision if he/she wants to.
DTLP16: I accept an appropriate form of intimacy (such as a celebratory hug for a special achievement) between students in my classroom.
DTLP30: I encourage students to ask for and provide forgiveness.
DTLP18: It is important for me to feel a close emotional connection with students.
Factor Three
DTLP24: I undertake specific activities in my classes aimed at promoting bonding between students.
DTLP20: I engage in an active student-teacher learning partnership by working directly with individual students.
DTLP10: I spend extended time with individuals or small groups of students to foster empathy among them.
DTLP27: If I can find a better alternative to making a sacrifice that achieves the same end, I will do that.
DTLP19: I make specific efforts to bond with students.
DTLP25: I make occasional major sacrifices for my students (for example using some of my own money for classroom events and my own spare time for support).
DTLP26: I consciously make minor daily sacrifices for my students such as helping them with a problem during a break.
Factor Four
DTLP3: I deliberately engage in weekly kind acts with my students in the context of my teaching.
DTLP2: I deliberately engage in daily kind acts with my students in the context of my teaching.
DTLP21: I try to get to know my students better.
Factor Five
DTLP33: I am obliged to forgive students when they ask for it.
DTLP32: A student who asks for forgiveness should be granted forgiveness, no matter what he or she has done.
Factor Six
DTLP4: Being kind to students is important to me.
DTLP5: In my classroom, it is important that all adults and children are kind to one another.
Open-ended Questions
   1. How do you define and perceive the concept of "loving pedagogy" in the context of your teaching experience with female senior high school students?

2. In what ways do you demonstrate your love, passion, or caring towards your students or the profession of teaching?
3. Can you share instances where you have observed learned helplessness and boredom among your female senior high school students, and what strategies have you employed to address or mitigate these phenomena?
4. How do you integrate elements of loving pedagogy into your teaching methods to create a supportive and engaging learning environment for female senior high school students