



## Unpacking Psychological Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

The learning modality has been greatly affected due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in switching from offline learning to online learning. While much research has investigated factors affecting students' online language learning engagement, a few studies have examined the EFL students' discernment of psychological factors. Therefore, this study adopted a quantitative design for data collection and analysis to scrutinize the psychological factors affecting EFL students' online learning engagement. A group of 174 EFL students conveniently chosen from three universities in Vietnam partook in answering a questionnaire whose data were quantitatively processed by the SPSS software. Three remarkable psychological factors, namely relaxation, self-confidence, and anxiety, were found to affect EFL students' online language learning engagement at a high level, whereas motivation, satisfaction, enjoyment, and interest moderately impacted their online language learning engagement. Additionally, anxiety was found to have no correlation with satisfaction but had negative correlations with other factors. Meanwhile, enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, and satisfaction were positively correlated with one another from strong to modest levels. This study suggests some recommendations in an attempt to enhance the quality of online learning modality in the research contexts and other similar ones.

**Keywords:** EFL student, engagement, online language learning, psychological factor, quantitative design

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has been spreading worldwide since the end of 2019 and has heavily affected human life. In Vietnam, the four outbreaks of the pandemic have caused over 11,526,332 cases (updated on January 24, 2023) (Worldometer, 2023). The epidemic has caused tremendous changes in the teaching and learning process. Many schools were temporarily closed to prevent the virus spread, and students were forced to switch from face-to-face interactions to virtual environments on the Internet (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Online learning, in fact, was not a completely new approach and has noticeably intensified over the past 15 years (Martin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). However, whether or not online learning is effective is debatable among educators.

By manifesting enormous hindrances and factors affecting e-learning, plenty of studies argued that online learning has hindered worldwide institutions at different levels (e.g., Alqurashi, 2018; Coman et al., 2021; Liu & Pu, 2020). Some major concerns include financial issues, education quality, interaction feedback, and technology (Alqurashi, 2018; Liu & Pu, 2020). Due to school closures during the Covid-19 crisis, countries around the world have been exploring technologies as an alternative way to provide continuous education over two consecutive academic years. Technologies, on the other side, were determined as one of the biggest obstacles for practitioners, especially in remote areas where deprivations of modern infrastructures had been severe (Coman et al., 2021; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). In terms of factors affecting e-learning, researchers encapsulated that students' interactions, self-efficacy, self-regulation, motivation, anxiety, and other psychological factors significantly impacted their online learning engagement and success (Agung et al., 2020; Coman et al., 2021; Kara, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022).

In the field of educational psychology, student engagement has been widely recognized as a concept of both offline and online learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). In recent years, online education has witnessed an increasing number of studies positioning great concern in learning engagement, with the major focus on learners' psychology influencing their engagement (Martin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). This trend was not an exception in the realm of second language learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Many studies have explored the factors affecting students' online learning engagement (e.g., Agung et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2022; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021), yet few of them investigated the students' perceptions of psychological factors, not to mention the discernment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in particular. When students had the option of choosing between different learning modes, their perceptions changed across the modes, which were essential to the effectiveness of online education (Agung et al., 2020; Zapata-

Cuervo et al., 2021). Overall, examining psychological factors mediating English learners' engagement is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of online English learning. Accordingly, the study hopes to bridge the gap within the literature by giving a reference for EFL practitioners, especially students, and instructors, to acknowledge these factors if there are any. Therefore, this study aims to scrutinize the psychological factors affecting Vietnamese EFL students' engagement in the context of online English language learning at three higher education institutions in Vietnam. The research questions are formed as follows:

1. What are the levels of psychological factors affecting Vietnamese EFL students' online language learning engagement?
2. What is the correlation among psychological factors affecting Vietnamese EFL students' online language learning engagement?

## **Literature Review**

### **Learners' Online Language Learning Engagement**

Learners' engagement is "the energy and effort that students employ within their learning community, observable via any number of behavioral, cognitive or affective indicators across a continuum" (Bond et al., 2020, p. 3). According to Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), language learners' engagement is a multidimensional system that is "active, holistic, and practical" (p. 5). Thereby, online language learning engagement can be conceptualized as the vigor and endeavor that students invest in online language courses and that are observed as multifaceted during learning processes. The engagement of learners is endorsed to contribute to the success of online learning and is different from one another (Martin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022).

Recently, there has been an emerging trend of research examining online learning engagement. Martin et al. (2020) noticed that online learning engagement was the largest research theme among 619 studies that were published from 2009 to 2018 and investigated online education. Zhang et al. (2022), using a bibliometric analysis, synthesized 1061 studies from 103 countries worldwide published between January 2020 and August 2021. The results demonstrated that during the Covid-19 crisis, learning engagement continued to grow and witnessed a predominant amount of research on psychological impacts on learners' engagement (Zhang et al., 2022).

Many studies revealed some factors mediating learners' engagement, including learners' digital literacy, personalities, self-directed learning, self-confidence, perceptions, anxiety,

enjoyment, relaxation, satisfaction, interest, and motivation (e.g., Clément et al., 1994; Kara, 2021; Kizilcec et al., 2017). With an online questionnaire, Kara (2021) disclosed that the self-regulations of 563 tertiary students in Turkey significantly mediated their online engagement. In examining learners' self-regulation in online platforms, Kizilcec et al. (2017) discovered a positive relationship between learners' successful engagement and their self-regulation in the online setting, which was determined by their academic motivation, academic self-efficacy, intention to succeed, time management, goal setting, course-content review, personalities, and persistency.

In language education, Clément et al. (1994) simultaneously surveyed 301 high school students and observed their English classes in Budapest, Hungary along with their teachers' evaluating journals. They proclaimed that the learning goal, homework quality, and classroom dynamics got students to actively engage in language classes. Furthermore, attitude, self-confidence, anxiety, interest, and motivation extensively intervened in the EFL in-class learning processes, (i.e., learners' engagement). Indeed, motivation, attitude, and self-confidence were positively correlated. Although satisfaction was not concluded to impact students' engagement, it was implied to be negatively correlated with anxiety when students used English.

### **Psychological Factors Affecting Learners' Online Language Learning Engagement**

Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) believed that language learners' engagement is dramatically impacted by learners' personal psychology. Psychological factors are a multidimensional combination of individuals' emotional status and experiences such as enjoyment, relaxation, motivation, confidence, satisfaction, interest, stress, anxiety, and boredom (Jiang et al., 2022; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Apart from the technical issues and students' personalities (e.g., self-regulation and persistence), many studies encapsulated that psychological factors were one of the major impacts affecting students' online learning engagement (e.g., Jiang et al., 2022; Piccoli et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2021). Jiang et al. (2022) identified motivation as having a positive impact on EFL students' online learning engagement. Enjoyment, hope, relaxation, calmness, stress, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, boredom, depression, insomnia, and helplessness were additionally shown to make students lose their focus and concentration (Dhawan, 2020; Yang et al., 2021). The lack of learners' motivation, satisfaction, and in-person interaction with negative perspectives were the most frequent influences on students' online engagement (Şener et al., 2020). High motivation enhanced students' satisfaction and voluntary participation in online discussions while the lack of teacher feedback or discouraging comments demotivated students in an online foreign language course (Rubio et al., 2017). Besides, Rubio et al. (2017) suggested that blended courses would be more

effective in maximizing students' motivation and proficiency in second language education than solely face-to-face or online courses.

Learners' positive attitude would increase their satisfaction, online-learning effectiveness, incentive, and interest (Piccoli et al., 2001). Coman et al. (2020) uncovered that 762 participants from two Romanian universities were under pressure of completing assigned tasks in a limited time and expressed their preferences for face-to-face or hybrid mode over learning exclusively online. Zapata-Cuervo et al. (2021) corroborated that students' self-efficacy, attitude, and anxiety were found to have a significant impact on their online engagement, thereby influencing learning outcomes. Overall, it is evident that psychological factors play a vital role in students' online learning, and students should be well conscious of these factors to either reduce negative effects or optimize their learning engagements.

In the second or foreign language context, many studies, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic have explored psychological factors mediating students' online engagements (e.g., Agung et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2022), yet the research on psychological factors affecting EFL students' online engagement in Vietnam remains less explored. This current study thereby investigates Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of psychological factors affecting their engagement during Covid-19.

Among various psychological factors named in the literature, some different terms referred to the same psychological factors while some others were reversed pairs of measurements. Thus, this study focuses on examining seven factors that stood out to significantly impact learners' online language learning engagement (i.e., enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, satisfaction, and anxiety) and eliminates factors that were implied in either of the above seven terms.

Enjoyment refers to a positive affective response, and an enjoyable activity occurs when a person perceives doing it as a reward (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Logically, students' learning engagement will be enhanced when they feel online classes are enjoyable. So far, the concept of enjoyment was opposite to boredom, so the boredom variable was eliminated from this study.

Relaxation is defined as the psychophysiological state of hyperarousal aiming at reducing stress or tension (Dunford & Thompson, 2010). To put it simply, the relaxation status of students studying online is when students feel less stressed, depressed, or under pressure. This also implies that the dimensions of stress and depression were the reversed measurement of relaxation while their calmness status also implied relaxation. As a result, this study did not measure stress, depression, and calmness alongside relaxation to avoid redundancy.

Interest can be conceived as an interactive relationship between a person and an object or certain aspects of his or her living environment (Krapp, 2002). Learning interest can be inferred

from this conceptualization as the extent to which students interact with online courses. In other words, the more students are interested in online activities, the more actively they interact in classes. Both relaxation and interest, apparently, affect the extent to which students engage in online learning.

Satisfaction in IT-application settings is defined as “the extent to which an application helps the user create value” (Delone & McLean, 2003, p. 20). Accordingly, in an online learning context, it can be perceived as the extent to which students value and appreciate online courses as matching their expectations.

Krashen (1981) contended that attitude was determined by motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, so this study delved more deeply by measuring each of these concepts instead of the attitude variable in general. Motivation is what moves students to learn English (McDonough, 2007) or the “combination of effort plus a desire to achieve the goal of learning the language” (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). Obviously, students with high motivation engage in learning more than those with lower motivation. Once students have learning motivation, they also have hope, and their helplessness feeling will logically not occur, leading to the measurement of motivation in this study instead of the helplessness and hope factors.

The self-confidence of EFL learners indicates their low anxious effect and high self-perceptions of their language learning (Clément et al., 1994). Bandura (1977) believed that one’s self-confidence would affect his/her choice of activities. In other words, when students are more confident in their ability to gain attainments, they may engage more actively in online classes.

Anxiety is “a complex, relatively unique emotional condition or reaction which consists of unpleasant, consciously-perceived feelings of tension and apprehension” (Spielberger, 1972, p. 29). According to Krashen’s theory (1981), anxiety is an effective filter in second language acquisition. It can be seen that when students feel less anxious, they tend to engage more in online classes. The concept of anxiety is contended to be identical to fear and guilt which were used in some studies.

To sum up, this study employed an analytical framework of seven dimensions to disclose psychological factors affecting EFL students’ online language learning engagement, including enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, satisfaction, and anxiety.

## Previous Studies

Of particular relevance to the current studies are the following previous studies investigating students’ perceptions of online learning.

Utilizing a close-and-open-ended questionnaire, Agung et al. (2020) surveyed 66 English learners at a Filipino university to investigate their perceptions of learning English online in terms

of resource delivery, the degree of their participation, and e-learning platform accessibility. It was found that the major barrier to their participation was technical issues and high expenses in investing in necessary infrastructures. Albeit most of the students actively took part in online activities, they found the assignments burdensome, which resulted in them having a negative experience. Psychological factors resulting in students' active participation and negative perceptions, however, were not elaborated.

Jiang et al. (2022) examined EFL learners' three core psychological factors (i.e., anxiety, motivation, and attitudes) during online learning due to Covid-19. A total of 293 EFL students from an institution in Iran responded to a questionnaire. The results revealed that participants' motivation, anxiety, and attitudes had a positive impact on their online learning. The participants' motivation and anxiety were negatively correlated, and their positive attitudes developed in learning the second language.

Şener et al. (2020), with an open-ended questionnaire, investigated 39 EFL instructors teaching at a university in Turkey about their online teaching experiences. Data disclosed that technical problems, emotions, heavy workloads, and financial burdens were cumbersome issues for teachers. They also reported that students, despite positive attitudes, lacked motivation and self-studying skills in online classes.

Yang et al. (2021) explored the emotions of six Chinese EFL students studying online during the epidemic. Based on the control-value theory, semi-structured interviews, and class journals, the researchers unraveled a variety of emotions, including “anxiety, enjoyment, relaxation, anger, hope, helplessness, calmness, guilt, and boredom” (p. 14), arranged in descending order of impact. These feelings were suggested to be alleviated with positive feedback from instructors, fascinating learning activities, sufficient fellow support, and good technical facilities.

With the wider settings in three different countries, Zapata-Cuervo et al. (2021) compared 523 students' perceptions of their engagement in online learning. The results showed that self-efficacy and motivation had a positive effect on online learning engagement and outcomes, while anxiety had a negative effect. Students in different countries behaved differently in terms of psychology and had varying levels of motivation, anxiety, and active involvement. Notably, the study discovered a positive correlation between anxiety and motivation.

These afore-reviewed studies focused on examining students' awareness of their online learning or the psychological factors that students were coping with when learning online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, whether or not EFL students are able to perceive what psychological factors to which they are facing, and which have been affecting their online learning, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, remains undiscovered. Therefore, this study aims at examining all

aforementioned psychological factors (i.e., enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, satisfaction, and anxiety) with a more diverse sample from different education levels.

## Methodology

### Participants

In this study, a group of 174 students were conveniently sampled from three higher education institutions in Vietnam. More than half of the participants (62.6%) were from 20 to 23 years old, followed by 27.6% aged under 20, and 9.8% were over 23. Nearly half of the participants (42%) had learned English for more than ten years, 39.7% had learned it for seven to ten years, and 18.4% had learned it for less than seven years. In terms of their self-reported English proficiency, the percentages with each level were as follows: 41.4% pre-intermediate, 33.3% intermediate, 15.5% upper-intermediate, 8% elementary, and 1.7% advanced. Their total time of self-studying English per day also varied. Namely, 51.7% spent from one to three hours, 28.7% allocated less than an hour, 16.7% studied within three to five hours, and 2.9% spent more than 5 hours.

### Research Instruments

Based on the literature review and research purposes, a closed-ended questionnaire was self-designed to garner the data of participants' background information (Part A) and to examine the psychological factors affecting their online learning engagement (Part B). Part B which is the main questionnaire content consists of 23 items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very untrue of me) to 5 (very true of me) divided into seven sub-parts: enjoyment (3 items), relaxation (3 items), interest (3 items), motivation (3 items), self-confidence (5 items), satisfaction (3 items), and anxiety (3 items). The questionnaire had been piloted before being officially used to collect the data. The English version questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese to ensure the content was fully understood by the participants. The translated version was double-checked by two Vietnamese native speakers who were university lecturers teaching the English language. The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was .906, which indicates its high reliability.



## Procedures

The study which adopted a quantitative research design for data collection and analysis was conducted at three higher education institutions in Vietnam. All participants were studying English online during the Covid-19 pandemic. The most common tool used to operate class meetings was Google Meets supplied by Google. Students studied approximately five courses per semester with a minimum of five 3-to-4-hour-long classes each week. Besides the main meeting rooms, different schools have implemented different virtual classrooms using e-learning platforms (e.g., Google Classroom and Moodle-based systems) to carry out virtual interactive classrooms. During class hours, both instructors and students entered the virtual meeting rooms and used Google Meets' functions (e.g., cameras, microphone, shared screen, chatbox, whiteboard, raised hand, etc.) to interact with each other. The lectures were shared on the screen so that all students could follow the lesson. Online activities varied across classes. Some classes applied breakout rooms for separating group discussions while others incorporated online tools such as Jamboard, Padlet, Quizlet, Kahoot, etc. to carry out quizzes or tests. The course materials posted on shared cloud sources (e.g., Google Drive) were accessible for students at anytime from anywhere.

## Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data, the questionnaire designed with a Google form was administered to students via email and social networks. Instructions and explanations were also sent to students. The returned valid responses were 174 after three weeks. To analyze the data collected from the questionnaire, the SPSS software (version 21) was run for descriptive statistics (mean:  $M$ ; standard deviation:  $SD$ ). The interval scale was interpreted in terms of impact level as 1.00- 1.80: very low, 1.81-2.60: low, 2.61-3.40: moderate, 3.41-4.20: high, and 4.21- 5.00: very high. The Pearson correlation test was used to measure the correlation among psychological factors in this study. The levels of correlation were interpreted based on Creswell's (2012) criteria, namely Pearson  $r > .636$  inferred strong correlations, the range from .338 to .635 was moderate, and  $r < .338$  indicated modest correlations.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

The psychological factors (including relaxation, self-confidence, enjoyment, interest, motivation, motivation, satisfaction, and anxiety) affecting EFL students' online language learning engagement were examined in this study.

#### *Relaxation Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

It can be seen from Table 1 that EFL students did not feel under pressure when taking online classes (item 1:  $M = 3.78$ ;  $SD = .70$ ), and they were less stressed in online classes than they were in physical classes (item 3:  $M = 3.65$ ;  $SD = .83$ ). Additionally, online classes gave them a relaxing studying environment (item 2:  $M = 3.85$ ;  $SD = .60$ ). In general, students' relaxation affected their online learning engagement at a high level.

**Table 1**

*Relaxation Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because...	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
1	I didn't feel under pressure when taking online classes.	.70	3.78	High
2	Staying at home during online classes gave me a relaxing studying environment.	.60	3.85	High
3	Joining online learning activities made me feel less stressed than in physical classes.	.83	3.65	High

#### *Self-Confidence Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

Table 2 illustrated that EFL students concurred that their self-confidence dramatically affected their online language learning. They believed they had performed well (item 4:  $M = 3.54$ ;  $SD = .69$ ), collaborated well with their classmates (item 5:  $M = 3.66$ ;  $SD = .63$ ), was able to deal with technological problems (item 6:  $M = 3.67$ ;  $SD = .71$ ), felt confident about taking part in challenging online learning activities (item 7:  $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = .72$ ), and entirely kept up with the pace of online classes (item 8:  $M = 3.78$ ;  $SD = .72$ ). These results reveal that students had varied discernment of their learning self-confidence, highly affecting their engagement in online language classes.

**Table 2**

*Self-Confidence Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because...	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
4	I believe that I performed well in online classes.	.69	3.54	High
5	I am sure that I collaborated well with my classmates during online classes.	.63	3.66	High
6	I was able to deal with technological problems to get full access to each of my online classes.	.71	3.67	High
7	I felt confident whenever I took part in challenging online learning activities.	.72	3.53	High
8	I could entirely catch up with the pace of online classes.	.72	3.78	High

*Enjoyment Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

The results in Table 3 show that EFL students' enjoyment in exciting (item 9: M = 3.16, SD = .53) and more enjoyable online classes (item 10: M = 3.00; SD = .58) had a moderate impact level on their online learning engagement. Nevertheless, they believed that their enjoyment in online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic was observed with a higher impact level on their engagement (item 11: M = 3.61; SD = .74).

**Table 3**

*Enjoyment Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because...	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
9	online learning was exciting.	.53	3.16	Moderate
10	online classes were more enjoyable than physical ones.	.58	3.00	Moderate
11	I enjoyed learning online during the Covid-19 pandemic.	.74	3.61	High

*Interest Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

With respect to the interest factors in Table 4, it is noticed that EFL students' interest in studying online (item 12: M=3.35; SD=.83), online learning activities (item 13: M=3.28; SD=.61), and online classes (item 14: M =3.06; SD=.65) was generally moderate. This implies students' interest moderately affected their online language learning engagement.

**Table 4**

*Interest Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because...	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
12	studying online was my most interest.	.83	3.35	Moderate
13	I found online learning activities interesting.	.61	3.28	Moderate
14	I always looked forward to the coming online classes.	.65	3.06	Moderate

### ***Motivation Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement***

Regarding the motivation factors (see Table 5), EFL students' motivation to take online classes as an interesting challenge (item 15: M = 3.53; SD = .71) affected their online language learning engagement at a high level. Their motivation to take online classes as benefits for their academic performance (item 17: M = 3.28; SD = .68) and future career (item 18: M = 3.27; SD = .65) affected their online language learning engagement at a moderate level. In brief, EFL students' motivation was seen as a positive factor affecting their online language learning engagement.

**Table 5**

#### *Motivation Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because....	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
15	taking online classes was an interesting challenge for me.	.71	3.53	High
16	online classes were helpful for my career.	.65	3.27	Moderate
17	online classes have helped me enhance my academic performance.	.68	3.28	Moderate

### ***Satisfaction Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement***

As for the satisfaction factors in Table 6, EFL students' online language learning engagement was moderately impacted by their satisfaction with their performances (item 18: M = 3.40, SD = .68), their classes' procedures (item 20: M = 3.31, SD = .69), and their expectation with their classes' efficiency (item 19: M = 3.22, SD = .71). This result reveals that EFL students' satisfaction with their online learning could affect their online language learning engagement at a moderate level.

**Table 6**

#### *Satisfaction Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because....	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
18	I'm satisfied with my performance during online classes.	.68	3.40	Moderate
19	The efficiency of online courses reached my expectations.	.71	3.22	Moderate
20	I'm satisfied with the ways online classes were carried out.	.69	3.31	Moderate

### ***Anxiety Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement***

With respect to the anxiety factors, the results in Table 7 indicate that EFL students believed that their feeling of less nervous about making mistakes (item 21:  $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) and stressed about expressing their ideas (item 23:  $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) in online classes highly affected their learning engagement. This implies that their anxiety affected their online language learning engagement at a high level. However, their worry about their course results impacted their learning engagement at a moderate level (item 22:  $M = 2.67$ ;  $SD = .80$ ).

**Table 7**

*Anxiety Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

No.	I got engaged in online language learning because...	N=174		Impact Level
		SD	M	
21	I felt less nervous when making mistakes than in front of my classmates in physical classes.	.75	3.76	High
22	I was worried about my course results in online classes.	.80	2.67	Moderate
23	I felt stressed when I had to express my ideas in online classes.	.69	3.85	High

### ***Psychological Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement***

Table 8 shows that the average mean score of the seven examined psychological factors is high at 3.42 ( $SD = .57$ ). The relaxation factor occupies the highest mean score at a high level ( $M = 3.76$ ;  $SD = .59$ ), and the interest factor has the lowest mean score at a moderate level ( $M = 3.23$ ;  $SD = .56$ ). This shows that among the seven factors, interest was the least affecting one on EFL students' online learning engagement. Despite fairly equal SD indicators, the relaxation factor ( $M = 3.76$ ;  $SD = .59$ ) occupies a much higher mean score than the satisfaction ( $M = 3.30$ ;  $SD = .58$ ), meaning participants' awareness was more obvious towards their relaxation status than their satisfaction. Similarly, most of the participants' rates of self-confidence were apparently higher than that of motivation and enjoyment. The three moderate factors were motivation ( $M = 3.36$ ;  $SD = .51$ ), enjoyment ( $M = 3.25$ ;  $SD = .51$ ), and interest ( $M = 3.23$ ;  $SD = .56$ ). Overall, it can be inferred that EFL students' online language learning engagement was highly affected by their relaxation, self-confidence, and anxiety, while motivation, satisfaction, enjoyment, and interest affected their online language learning engagement at a moderate level.

**Table 8**

*All Components of Psychological Factors*

No.	Factors	N=174			
		SD	M	Impact Level	Rank
1	Relaxation	.59	3.76	High	1
2	Self-confidence	.52	3.63	High	2
3	Enjoyment	.51	3.25	Moderate	6
4	Interest	.56	3.23	Moderate	7
5	Motivation	.51	3.36	Moderate	4
6	Satisfaction	.58	3.30	Moderate	5
7	Anxiety	.75	3.43	High	3
Average total mean score		.57	3.42	High	

***Correlation Among Psychological Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement***

The Pearson correlation test indicates that the anxiety factor had no correlation with satisfaction ( $p > .05$ ) and had modest, negative correlations ( $p < .05$ ) with enjoyment ( $r = -.251$ ), relaxation ( $r = -.277$ ), interest ( $r = -.283$ ), motivation ( $r = -.182$ ), and self-confidence ( $r = -.274$ ). This means that EFL students' anxiety did not affect their learning satisfaction, but the more anxious they were, the less enjoyed, relaxed, interested, motivated, and self-confident they became.

Enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, and satisfaction all had positive correlations with one another ( $p < .01$ ). This indicates that students who enjoyed online language learning were likely to feel relaxed, interested, motivated, confident, and satisfied with their learning engagement. Indeed, the strongest positive correlation was between enjoyment and interest ( $r = .728$ ), followed by the pair of interest and motivation ( $r = .668$ ), and motivation with satisfaction ( $r = .645$ ) while the least strong positive correlation was between relaxation and satisfaction ( $r = .351$ ). Enjoyment significantly correlated at strong levels with interest ( $r = .728$ ), and moderate levels with motivation ( $r = .587$ ), relaxation ( $r = .471$ ), satisfaction ( $r = .476$ ), and self-confidence ( $r = .465$ ). Relaxation significantly correlated at moderate levels with satisfaction ( $r = .351$ ), self-confidence ( $r = .409$ ), motivation ( $r = .472$ ), and interest ( $r = .609$ ). Interest significantly correlated at a strong level with motivation ( $r = .668$ ), and moderate levels with self-confidence ( $r = .512$ ), and satisfaction ( $r = .508$ ). Motivation significantly correlated at a strong level with satisfaction ( $r = .645$ ) and a moderate level with self-confidence ( $r = .614$ ). Self-confidence significantly correlated at a moderate level with satisfaction ( $r = .620$ ).

**Table 9**

*Correlation Among Psychological Factors Affecting EFL Students' Online Language Learning Engagement*

		Enjoyment	Relaxation	Interest	Motivation	Self-confidence	Satisfaction	Anxiety
Relaxation	Pearson	.471**	1					
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
	N	174	174					
Interest	Pearson	.728**	.609**	1				
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
	N	174	174	174				
Motivation	Pearson	.587**	.472**	.668**	1			
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
	N	174	174	174	174			
Self-confidence	Pearson	.465**	.409**	.512**	.614**	1		
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	N	174	174	174	174	174		
Satisfaction	Pearson	.476**	.351**	.508**	.645**	.620**	1	
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174	
Anxiety	Pearson	-.251**	-.277**	-.283**	-.182*	-.274**	-.016	1
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.016	.000	.831	
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174	174

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

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

The study unraveled some significant findings that were supported by previous research. With regard to psychological factors affecting EFL students' online learning engagement, all seven measured factors (i.e., relaxation, self-confidence, enjoyment, interest, motivation, satisfaction, and anxiety) were shown to have significant impacts, which is similar to findings in numerous studies (e.g., Dhawan, 2020; Jiang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021). Elaborating explicitly on each factor, the current study's findings are both consistent and opposite to previous studies.

In terms of the impact levels, similar to several studies (e.g., Jiang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021), relaxation, self-confidence, and anxiety occupied high degrees of influence on students' online language learning. Meanwhile, the four factors: Motivation, satisfaction, enjoyment, and interest moderately impacted students' engagement in online language classes, which was reinforced by some studies (e.g., Alqurashi, 2018; Dhawan, 2020). The descending order of impact levels found in the current study was different from Yang et al. (2021) who asserted that anxiety had the highest impact and enjoyment impacted higher than relaxation. Compared to face-to-face classes, students in this study felt more relaxed and less anxious when engaging in online classes. One plausible reason for the significant impact of relaxation, self-confidence, and anxiety factors over others may come from the studying environment. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) believed that school environments, different from familial settings, emphasized the importance of learning, which determined learners' engagement. This implies that the "feel-at-home" studying atmosphere affected students' learning status. Students probably felt more relaxed and were less engaged in learning, assuming their classmates were also not as concentrated as in physical classes. Thus, they might be more confident and less worried about being criticized when making mistakes in online classes. This reason to some extent explains why three factors: Relaxation, self-confidence, and anxiety, had the highest impact levels among all seven psychological dimensions.

The results revealed that enjoyment, interest, motivation, and satisfaction moderately affected EFL students' online learning engagement. Some reasonable explanations could be proposed for these phenomena. One reason is that students might not feel that online learning was enjoyable or interesting in general, implied by the moderate average rates, but during the Covid-19 pandemic, their enjoyment highly impacted their engagement in online language classes. Perhaps, when students had to adapt the purely online learning due to the lockdown, they realized more interesting facets of this learning mode. With moderate rates, the motivation and satisfaction factors did not influence students' engagement, and students revealed their doubts about online classes' values and efficiency. Doubting the usefulness and quality of online classes, the students



might not have had clear learning goals, which affected the extent of effort and desire they invested in their studies. In other words, they appeared to lack study motivation and to be disoriented during the pandemic, resulting in dissatisfied feelings. Different from the findings of Agung et al. (2020), participants in this study considered online learning to be a positive challenge even though they felt disoriented and lacked motivation in general.

With respect to relationships among psychological factors, positive correlations between enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, and satisfaction were found. This finding was in line with previous studies (Clément et al., 1994; Jiang et al., 2022) and the conceptual theory of Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) about engaging English learners. The strong relationships among enjoyment, interest, motivation, and satisfaction could be explicated by the fact that when students enjoyed the classes, they felt the classes were interesting and satisfying, which accordingly raised their motivation to keep studying. Similarly, when they believed in their capability (i.e., high self-confidence levels) and felt relaxed while studying, their interest, motivation, and satisfaction with the learning engagement increased.

By contrast, the anxiety factor had no correlation with the satisfaction factor. In other words, when students felt less anxious about their course results or their performances, it did not mean that they were satisfied with the results. A potential basis for this opposite finding against Clément et al. (1994) might be the discrepancy between offline and online English learning. Anxiety also had negative correlations with other factors, probably because with a low anxiety level, students engaged more relaxingly, interestingly, and confidently in online-class activities. While Zapata-Cuervo et al. (2021) disclosed that high anxiety about taking online courses motivated some students to get engaged more actively to better understand the courses, this study's results demonstrated a negative correlation between anxiety and motivation, which is similar to Jiang's (2022) findings. One possible explanation might come from the difference in participants' cultures and characteristics.

Another interesting finding of this undertaken study was that positive and negative impacts simultaneously existed during EFL students' online learning. This was in line with the results of some studies (Jiang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021). However, different from the finding of Coman et al. (2020) that students' perceptions of e-learning were consistent in spite of various backgrounds, this study noticed a substantial variation in students' perceptions of these factors.

## Conclusions

This study used a quantitative approach to investigate the psychological factors that influence the engagement of EFL students in online learning. The study evinced that relaxation, self-confidence, and anxiety highly affected EFL students' engagement in online language learning. Anxiety was found to be negatively correlated with other factors but not with satisfaction. Conversely, enjoyment, relaxation, interest, motivation, self-confidence, and satisfaction were positively correlated with each other.

This study's plausible findings yielded valuable recommendations for practitioners in the field. First and foremost, instructors are suggested to create a more relaxing and less anxious studying environment, thereby enhancing students' confidence. It is recommended that the hybrid mode of online and offline learning be widely implemented for students' higher motivation and relaxation with lower anxiety levels. Instructors should additionally be mindful of the strong correlations among enjoyment, interest, motivation, and satisfaction to optimize online English teaching. Researchers could further conduct research on the anxiety factor in depth in order to help students feel less anxious when studying online courses.

On the other hand, because motivation, satisfaction, enjoyment, and interest had a moderate impact on their learning engagement, these factors are recommended to be well-acknowledged by both instructors and students. It is advisable that EFL instructors join more training courses on what psychological factors may affect students' learning engagement and how to optimize the class activities to enhance students' motivation, satisfaction, enjoyment, and interest up to acceptable extents. Besides, instructors should help students be aware of these factors so that they can self-regulate their learning or ask for support to timely adjust these factors to reach their studying goals. Psychological training from experts is recommended for students to be able to self-evaluate which factors they are coping with and how to control them. That training would further benefit students in that it would raise their perceptions of their strengths, interest, passion, and motivation to orientate their career paths. Administrators are suggested to support and invest in suitable facilities and online tools for EFL instructors to create more interesting, interactive classes and to accelerate teaching-learning quality; hence, boosting students' satisfaction, enjoyment, motivation, and interest. Administrators should also be in charge of holding the training for instructors, focusing on how instructors can help students deal with psychological factors that students might encounter.

This study has some limitations, accordingly, providing implications for future research. Firstly, this study was a quantitative design using only one research instrument (questionnaire) for data collection. Secondly, this study collected participants' perceptions from three institutions, but

it did not compare the differences in psychological factors affecting their online language learning engagement. Consequently, findings from this study might not be generalized. Therefore, further studies should focus on the mixed methods design using more research instruments (e.g., interviews and reflection) for data collection. Additionally, the sample size from different institutions should be large enough for comparison and contrast.

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