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Reliance on Student Engagement: Do Academic Degree and Teaching Experience Matter?

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to examine the relationship between the academic degree and teaching experience of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and their reliance on student engagement. To this end, eight EFL teachers (male and female) with different teaching experiences and academic degrees and a number of 40 students in their respective classes were selected through convenience sampling. First, the teachers and the students filled out consent forms, including their personal information, such as gender, age, academic degree, and years of teaching experience. Second, the students answered Skinner et al.'s (2008) 'Engagement vs. Disaffection with Learning: Student-report' Questionnaire, a valid scale for measuring language learners' engagement with teaching-learning tasks and their satisfaction with their learning activities. Then, Pearson's product-moment correlation between teachers' teaching experience and academic degree, as well as the students' self-expressed ratings of their engagement or disaffection with classroom learning activities, was calculated. The results showed significant positive correlations between teaching experience and behavioral and emotional engagement and significant negative correlations between teaching experience and behavioral and emotional disaffection.

Keywords: Academic degree, teaching experience, student engagement, disaffection

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INTRODUCTION

The psychological process of student engagement has been defined as students' investment and participation in school activities and learning processes (Marks, 2000). The three concepts of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement have abundantly been discussed separately in the literature. However, what makes student engagement specific is that, as Fredricks et al. (2004) and Fredricks and McColskey (2012) note, it is a meta-construct that includes all the three dimensions of engagement. According to Fredricks and McColskey (2012, p. 764), the behavioral dimension of student engagement refers to "participation and includes involvement in academic, social, or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out," or what has come to be known as time-on-task. The emotional dimension refers to students' interest and positive and negative attitudes and reactions to such participants in the educational context as teachers, classmates, academics, or emotional identification with the school environment and the feeling of belonging to and caring about it and its outcomes and processes (Finn, 1989). Finally, cognitive engagement refers to students' interest, dedication, investment in learning, and strategic self-regulation in the learning process and decision-making (Fredricks et al., 2004; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988).

As Connell et al. (1994) claim, student engagement reduces the success gap between disadvantaged and successful students. Furthermore, Fredricks et al. (2004) and Marks (2000) emphasize the need for exploring the complex relationships between students' thoughts, behaviors, and emotions due to the strong relationship found between student engagement and academic success. This emphasis indicates that students with high cognitive engagement tend to implement the learning requirements and show high rates of academic achievement and success (Greene et al., 2004; Zapata et al., 2022).

On the one hand, despite previous research on student engagement and its effects, as mentioned above, one closely pertinent question is what teacher-related characteristics make English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

teachers more attentive to the inclusive construct of student engagement in their classroom management orientations. This is a question awaiting further research to bridge the gap in previous studies on student engagement. Evidence in the literature supports the relationship of EFL teachers' teaching experience and academic degree with many teacher-related variables and qualities (e.g., Ladd, 2008; Sass, 2007). On the other hand, previous research indicates that teachers' beliefs and conceptions influence their professional choices and priorities directed at fostering student engagement (Alamri et al., 2020; Berger et al., 2018; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fives et al., 2015; Richardson, 1996). Inspired by such empirical findings about the significance of teachers' beliefs and conceptions as well as their teaching experience and academic degree, likewise, exploring the relationship between EFL teachers' academic degree and teaching experience and the extent to which they emphasize student engagement in teaching-learning activities, processes, and decisions is worth due attention and consideration.

According to Clatk and Paren (2007), teachers' professional experience and educational background (academic degree) constitute two main criteria for recruiting second language teachers. Also, the relationship between many teacher-related characteristics, including teachers' professional experience and academic degree and their reliance on student engagement, seems to be severely under-researched. Sufficient research is needed to probe the relationships among such factors. The present study has aimed at exploring the relationship between EFL teachers' professional experience and academic degree and their use and reliance on student engagement as a facilitating element of the learning process and fostering learner autonomy. Therefore, sufficient research is needed to cast light on the relationships between these variables, which naturally constitute a significant part of a teacher's professional repertoire of skills, strategies, techniques, and priorities.

This study and similar studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and teacher development and recruitment can help us direct or redirect our attention toward the real function of academic degree

and teaching experience without mistakenly downgrading or boasting about the effects of such variables while hiring teachers for different educational purposes, especially for English language teaching (ELT) purposes. For example, if such studies reveal that EFL teachers' academic degree is positively related to their use of student engagement in teaching-learning processes, we come to the understanding that promoting EFL teachers in terms of academic degree and studying, be it through furthering their academic education or in-service training programs, should be considered a primary focus in teacher development programs. The same formula could be applied to EFL teachers' teaching experience. These sorts of understanding about EFL teachers, in themselves, greatly influence the extent to which they can contribute to the autonomy and success of EFL students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of academic engagement has abundantly appeared in recent SLA literature, emerging from theoretical, empirical, and practical sources (Fredricks et al., 2004). Student engagement refers to their connection and involvement in an educational activity for the purpose of enhancing their achievement and learning (e.g., Skinner et al., 2009). Student engagement has attracted lots of attention for the following reasons: it enhances learner achievement and facilitates identifying at-risk students (Finn, 1989; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). As Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) state, studying student engagement in relation to language learning can be a promising line of inquiry in letting language teachers foster student engagement and prevent disaffection. As stated earlier, the idea of student engagement has been welcome for its facilitating effect on students' progress and achievement, the negative effects associated with student disengagement, making the identification of poorer students feasible, high degree of student dropout, and educational failure due to student disengagement and disaffection, and so on (Finn, 1989; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012).

It logically seems that students cannot learn something and master it simply by being explained by an expert teacher unless they are actively and purposefully engaged in it. This engagement makes the subject more realistic and meaningful for the learners because they are, in fact, touching and feeling it themselves directly without being passively familiarized with it by someone else. Their cognitive, affective, and meta-cognitive abilities are activated when they experience the subject of instruction themselves which is almost unlikely to happen merely through another person's talking about it. There is substantial variation in how experts define engagement in the literature. One aspect of engagement refers to the dimensions of engagement being assessed, such as behavioral, emotional, or cognitive. A second aspect has to do with the object of engagement, whether engagement at the level of school or engagement of all students or individual students in a classroom. Student engagement primarily deals with and is concerned with fostering students' enhanced achievement, positive behaviors, and sense of belonging in such a way that their commitment and interest in schools can be retained.

As Eccles and Wang (2012) propose, engagement varies along an increasing continuum of layers or levels. These levels start with students' involvement at the level of school as a global context, for example, by involvement in activities at the school level. The different levels of student needs in different educational contexts can be explained in terms of Self Determination Theory (SDT). SDT posits that need-supportive teaching can enhance student engagement in learning activities (Chiu, 2022; Leo et al., 2022). The next level relates to engagement in the classroom and subject-matter activities such as students' interactions with their teachers. The third level is engagement in particular learning activities within the classroom, such as moment-to-moment trivial activities aimed at enhancing learning in the instructional process within the classroom (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Awareness of all these constraints and how applying it in the right way can enhance student engagement. This awareness is among teacher characteristics that are likely to influence student engagement. Such teacher

characteristics can be associated with teachers' teaching experience and academic degree.

Engagement is generally believed to have three main dimensions. One dimension is the behavioral dimension, including active participation in classroom activities or school-level activities. The other dimension is the emotional dimension, such as affective responses to classroom experiences. Finally, the third dimension refers to the cognitive dimension, which entails mental efforts for facilitating learning and performance, such as self-regulated planning and preference for the challenge (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1989).

Several factors are likely to influence student engagement. Among such factors, one can refer to the role of context, positive learning experiences, structure of school, task features, classroom processes, teachers' expectations and instruction, parents' expectations and education, students' mental state, and students' supportive relationships with adults and peers which increase the possibility of students' remaining actively engaged in school (e.g., Jang, et al., 2010; Marks, 2000; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Student engagement has been shown to be positively correlated with learner achievement and negatively correlated with the probability of student dropout at schools (Fredricks et al., 2004). Hassaskhah et al. (2012) found that there exists a higher correlation between affective engagement and academic success for second-year students in that they were more engaged than students of the other years. They also claim that, according to the results of the study, the longer the students stay in college, the less effectively they get engaged.

Engaged students usually achieve higher scores and perform better on standardized tests (Marks, 2000). Research has shown that engagement declines as students advance to the upper elementary and middle school levels, reaching their lowest levels in high school (e.g., Marks, 2000). This decline can still be sharper and higher as students spend enter low-performing, high-poverty schools (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Some studies suggest that as much as 40–60 percent of students are disengaged by the

time they enter high school (Marks, 2000). Therefore, not surprisingly, enhancing and increasing student engagement has been an explicit goal of many schools and district improvement efforts, especially at the secondary level (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Estimating the degree of student engagement helps teachers and school principals identify at-risk learners because being dropped out of school is the only alternative left for disengaged students after a long process of inactivity and disengagement (Finn, 1989). Disengagement can have more disadvantages for students from less-privileged backgrounds. They are less likely to accomplish their studies and graduate. Also, they will have fewer prospects for employment, which increases their risks of poverty, poor health, and involvement in the criminal justice system (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2004). Consequently, many stakeholders, including educators and school psychologists, hold an interest in gathering more information and data on engagement and disengagement for needs assessment, diagnosis, and prevention purposes. One significant point that should be added at this point of the discussion relates to what factors increase the likelihood of student engagement in classrooms. Taylor and Parsons (2011, p. 7), reviewing the literature on student engagement, cite some factors which contribute to student engagement. These factors include (1) Interaction, (2) Exploration, (3) Relevancy, (4) Multimedia, (5) Instruction, and (6) Authentic assessment.

Some research projects have demonstrated that students' engagement is a strong predictor of their educational outcomes. They indicate that students with a higher degree of behavioral and cognitive engagement achieve higher grades and have higher levels of motivation for higher education (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Stewart (2008) has found that emotional engagement was positively correlated with and predicted academic performance. According to Wang and Holcombe (2010), student engagement mediates between supportive school contexts on the one hand and academic achievement and school completion on the other. Other researchers have also claimed that increasing student engagement is a

significant factor that reduces the rate of school dropout among students (e.g., Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Other research studies have also revealed that higher levels of students' behavioral and emotional engagement significantly lower the rate of depression, delinquency, and substance use (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2011). Henry et al. (2012) also concluded that school disengagement was correlated with negative indicators of youth development, including higher rates of substance use, problem behaviors, and delinquency. Research on the effect of student engagement further indicates that high engagement may result in greater academic success, and greater academic success can facilitate even greater academic engagement (Hughes et al., 2008).

While teachers' academic educational background, qualifications, and teaching experiences constitute part of their recruitment criteria by different educational organizations and centers (Clark & Paran, 2007), there seems to be a scarcity of empirical background on the relationship between such teacher-related factors and the degree to which they employ such instructional tricks and techniques as learner engagement for enhancing and flourishing learner achievement and autonomy.

As Pajares (1992) and Thompson (1992) observe, teachers' beliefs make up an integral part of their professional qualifications because they highly determine teachers' choice of action, preferences, and practical priorities. Moreover, it is a fact that one's academic degree and teaching experiences influence one's beliefs and attitudes (As Pajares, 1992; Thompson, 1992). If so, teachers' academic degree and teaching experience must logically influence their professional act. If teaching experience directly or indirectly influences a teacher's choice of any of these approaches to classroom management and, hence, teaching his or her teaching options, and if we consider language assessment as belonging to a teacher's repertoire of teaching options, then, it is safe to conclude that teaching experience is likely to influence a teacher's conceptions and perceptions of second language assessment.

Teachers with differential teaching experiences are likely to have different conceptualizations of assessment, its roles, and how it is to be done, as teaching experience has been shown to influence other choices of a language teacher. It is time to present an account of second language assessment at this point of the discussion. So far, it has been tried to tap into the issue of teaching experience and how it is likely to influence such teacher-related factors as classroom management, teaching methods and techniques, and conceptions of assessment. However, the relationship between teaching experience and conceptions of second language assessment has only been indirect in the preceding discussion. This is why the present study aims at exploring this relationship more precisely. Of course, such a relationship is still awaiting further research before any strong claims can be made about it. This concern has been reflected by Zhang (2008) as well.

Teacher education level and teacher experience, two main attributes of teacher quality, have gained attention and have been the focus of many investigations. However, results of existing meta-analytic reviews examining the relationship between student achievement and both teacher education level and experience are in conflict, with some suggesting a positive relationship and others suggesting no relationship (Goldhaber, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2002). Akbari and Moradkhani (2010) aimed at exploring whether Iranian EFL teachers' years of teaching experience and academic degree would predict their efficacy beliefs. They found that "experienced teachers (with more than three years of teaching experience) had a significantly higher level of global efficacy, efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies compared to their novice counterparts" (p. 25).

As an essential and highly correlated factor influencing student engagement, we can refer to the classroom management styles of teachers. Classroom management has been defined as the teacher's attempt to anticipate and supervise classroom activities, including teaching and learning activities, social teacher-student and/or student-student interactions

within a classroom, and learner behavior (e.g., Good & Brophy, 2006). Classroom management has also been defined as a teacher's success in creating an appropriate classroom atmosphere suited for teaching and learning (Brophy, 1986). It is highly influenced by teachers' attachment styles which determine their emotional relationships with their students (Bonnell, 2021). Different teacher attributes can be associated with and influence teachers' attachment styles, among which teachers' experience and academic degree can be cited as examples in this study. Whatever definition one would consider for classroom management, one should be aware of the importance of classroom management skills as encompassing and influencing all other tactics and behaviors to which a teacher resorts to ensure success in the teaching-learning process.

A wide range of studies has investigated the relationship between teaching experience and classroom management. As an example of research on the relationship between teaching experience and classroom management, one could refer to Ünal and Ünal's (2012) study. They investigated whether teaching experience would have anything to do with how teachers manage their classrooms. A number of 268 primary school teachers were selected as the participants in this study, and the findings revealed that teachers with more experience were more inclined to take control of affairs in their classrooms than novice teachers. However, they also engaged the students in the decision-making process. Overall, the previous research suggests that pre-service teachers adopt a non-interventionist approach to classroom management, which means minimum teacher control. In addition, they follow an interaction-based approach during the early years of their teaching career, which allows shared control. Finally, they choose complete teacher control when they are fully-experienced teachers.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research study has specifically aimed at answering the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between the academic degree of EFL teachers and their use and reliance on students' engagement at school?
2. Is there any significant relationship between the professional experience of EFL teachers and their use and reliance on students' engagement at school?

METHOD

Participants

A number of eight EFL teachers (male and female) who were teaching at English language institutions in Sanandaj took part in this study. They spoke Kurdish as their L1. Moreover, these teachers asked their students to participate in the study. A number of students (N = 40) agreed to participate as the subjects of this study. The teachers were selected based on their experience of teaching EFL and their academic degree ranging from more than three years of teaching experience (experienced teachers) to three and less than three years of teaching experience (novice teachers). Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree and Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree were considered a low academic degree, and Master of Arts (M.A.) degree and Ph.D. degree were considered a high academic degree. Their age ranged from 25 to 47 years. They had signed consent forms to participate in the study and were selected based on convenience sampling. They had been teaching English from one to 25 years. First, the sample (eight teachers) was divided into two groups of low and high teaching experience (four teachers in each group). Then, each group was further subdivided into a low and high academic degree. Of the eight teachers, four were assigned to the high-teaching-experience subgroup and four others into the low-teaching-experience subgroup. Next, each subgroup of four teachers was further subdivided into two teachers with a high academic degree and two with a low academic

degree.

Data Collection Procedure

First, the researchers held a briefing session to acquaint the teacher participants with the concepts of teaching experience, academic degree, and student engagement. Next, they went through the same procedure to acquaint the students with the concept of student engagement. The researchers also explained the study's scope, purpose, and aim. Next, the teachers were asked to complete the demographic information questionnaire. Afterward, the student participants were wanted to answer the Student Engagement Questionnaire. This questionnaire was adapted from Skinner et al. (2008) and used by Connell and Wellborn (1991), Connell et al. (1994), and Skinner et al. (2009). Finally, learners gave reports on their involvement and on the other hand, on their disaffection in the classroom.

To do so, the learners answered the items in this measure to draw on their own behavioral and emotional engagement in (or withdrawal from) learning activities in the classroom. The behavioral participation was measured using five items that drew on learners` attempts, attention, and perseverance while generating and being engaged in learning activities. Behavioral disaffection was measured using five items that drew on students' lack of attempt and having no engagement in the learning activities. The emotional engagement was assessed using five items that drew on emotions that showed learners' enthusiasm in being involved in learning activities. Additionally, emotional disaffection was assessed using 12 items that focused on emotions that showed learners' motivation to withdraw or be alienated to participate in learning activities. Learners answered all these items using a four-point answer format (not at all true, not very true, sort of true, very true). Furthermore, the researchers calculated the scores by averaging the items within a scale (with negative items reverse coded), so all scale scores ranged from 1 to 4, with 4 showing more positive behavioral or emotional engagement.

Finally, in order to answer the first research question about the relationship between the academic degree of the Iranian EFL teachers and their use and reliance on student engagement, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to answer the second research question about the relationship between the teaching experience of the Iranian EFL teachers and their use and reliance on student engagement.

RESULTS

All statistical computations are presented in the following section to answer the research questions and test the corresponding hypotheses.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for the questionnaire responses*

Engagement Components	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Number of Items
B.E.	16	2.81	11	20	5
BD	10.15	2.36	7	19	5
EE	11.63	5.93	4	20	5
ED	12.65	3.50	7	19	12

Note. B.E.: Behavioral Engagement; B.D.: Behavioral Disaffection; E.E.: Emotional Engagement; E.D.: Emotional Disaffection

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the scores obtained from the four subcomponents of the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning Student Report. These statistics include the mean score, the standard deviation, the minimum scores, and the maximum scores on each subscale.

Table 2: *Normality of the scores on all subscales*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
B.E.	.137	40	.088	.936	40	.066
B.D.	.200	40	.070	.860	40	.060
E.E.	.179	40	.073	.875	40	.064
E.D.	.125	40	.115	.946	40	.061

As the p-values in Table 2 indicate, the scores on all subscales of the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning Student Report were normally distributed. Therefore, the normality assumption was met in this study. Furthermore, other preliminary analyses underlying correlation analysis were performed prior to the main correlation computations, which showed that all the pre-requisite conditions were satisfied.

Table 3: *Reliability of the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning Student Report*

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
B.E. .74	5
B.D. .71	5
E.E. .69	5
E.D. .76	12

As shown in Table 3, all subscales of the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning Student Report enjoyed acceptable indices of reliability in this study.

Table 4: *Correlations between teaching experience and engagement components*

Exp. Group	Degree Group			BE	BD	EE	ED
High Exp.	High Degree	Exp.	Pearson Corr.	.71*	-.74*	.81*	-.69*
			Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.001
	Low Degree	Exp.	Pearson Corr.	.68*	-.49*	.77*	-.68*
			Sig.	.002	.00 3	.000	.001
Low Exp.	High Degree	Exp.	Pearson Corr.	.66*	-.68*	.70*	-.56*
			Sig.	.002	.001	.000	.005
	Low Degree	Exp.	Pearson Corr.	.59*	-.40*	.57*	-.60*
			Sig.	.004	.007	.002	.002

As it can be seen in Table 4, in both levels of teaching experience and academic degree, i.e., high and low teaching experience and academic degree, significant positive correlation coefficients were found between teaching experience and two components of Student Engagement

(behavioral engagement and emotional engagement). Moreover, significant negative correlations were observed between teaching experience and the other two components of Student Engagement (behavioral disaffection and emotional disaffection). Therefore, in response to both research questions, it can be said that there were significant relationships between EFL teachers' teaching experience and academic degree with their reliance on student engagement in their teaching practices. All in all, the observable difference between the high and low levels of teaching experience and academic degree was that the magnitude of correlations was higher for teachers with higher teaching experience and academic degree. However, the results allow us to reject the formulated null hypotheses safely and conclude that teaching experience and academic degree influence EFL teachers' reliance on engaging their students in various teaching and learning classroom activities and procedures.

Table 5: Correlations between academic degree and engagement components

Exp. Group	Degree Group			BE	BD	EE	ED
High Exp.	High Degree	Degree	Pearson Corr.	.43	-.46	.39	-.47
			Sig.	.08	.07	.10	.07
	Low Degree	Degree	Pearson Corr.	.44	-.36	.35	-.44
			Sig.	.08	.13	.13	.08
Low Exp.	High Degree	Degree	Pearson Corr.	.23	-.20	.17	-.31
			Sig.	.15	.16	.23	.12
	Low Degree	Degree	Pearson Corr.	.30	-.24	.29	-.24
			Sig.	.13	.15	.14	.15

The figures in Table 5 indicate that there were no significant correlations between academic degree and the different components of student engagement. However, considering the fact that the magnitudes of correlations in the high-experience groups were higher, it can be concluded that the single influencing variable was teaching experience. This is because the academic degree was not generally found to be significantly correlated with student engagement categories. However, when combined with higher teaching experience, its correlations with the facets of student engagement

were higher. Therefore, in response to the first question, it could be postulated that there was no significant relationship between academic degree and teachers' use of student engagement.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between the academic degree and teaching experience of Iranian EFL teachers and their reliance on student engagement. To this end, the teachers and the students filled out consent forms, including their personal information, such as gender, age, academic degree, and years of teaching experience. Furthermore, their responses were categorized based on the classes they belonged to. For teachers with long teaching experience and high academic degree, their students' responses to the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning Student Report revealed a high degree of student behavioral and emotional engagement, while significantly lower or even negative correlations were found between teaching experience and academic degree on the one hand and behavioral and emotional disaffection the other hand. In other words, in these groups, both academic degree and teaching experience were significantly and positively correlated with behavioral and emotional engagement but insignificantly and/or negatively correlated with behavioral and emotional disaffection.

These findings, which were in line with other studies such as Stewart (2008) and Wang and Holcombe (2010), indicate that teaching experience is a determining factor in the degree of teachers' dependence on engaging their students in teaching-learning processes. The results suggest that teaching experience is a stronger indicator of the extent to which EFL teachers believe in student engagement in language learning activities instead of teacher-dominated classroom management, which can be a characterizing element of teachers with lower teaching experiences. Probably, academic degree would not play a key role in deriving teachers toward student engagement as a central feature of language classes as teaching experience

does. Further support for this finding can be found in a study conducted by Bonnell (2021), who found that teacher attachment style and emotional relationship with students, which can be the result of teaching experience and academic degree, facilitated student engagement in educational activities.

As far as the obtained results indicated, the determining factor for these groups of students seemed to be teaching experience as compared to the academic degree because even where the degree was lower, the results happened to be repeated only with minor changes. As regards the students' responses in classes managed by EFL teachers with low teaching experience and high academic degree or low teaching experience and low academic degree, the pattern of the results was almost the same or similar except in the magnitude of correlations. For example, in the low experience/high degree group, teaching experience turned out to be significantly positively correlated with behavioral engagement and emotional engagement and significantly negatively correlated with behavioral and emotional disaffection as well. Similarly, in the low experience/low degree group, teaching experience showed a significant correlation with behavioral and emotional engagement while being significantly negatively correlated with behavioral and emotional disaffection.

One fascinating result which came out of the data analysis procedure in this study was that the direction of the correlations between teaching experience and behavioral and emotional disaffection at both levels of teaching experience was negative, which indicates that teaching experience and behavioral and emotional disaffection do not go together. That is, where there is high teaching experience, there will be less student behavioral and emotional disaffection. Conversely, when teaching experience is low, the students will be more likely to be behaviorally and emotionally disaffected by their teachers' engagement behaviors. These findings were consistent with that of Hughes et al. (2008), as teaching experience itself accounts for awareness of such understandings and recognition of the role of student engagement. The findings also accord with the finding in Leo et al. (2022)

that teachers' teaching behavior, which can be a function of their teaching experience, was positively correlated with student engagement.

The finding that academic degree was not significantly correlated with either of the components of student engagement signals the fact that only the hands-on practical experience of EFL teachers is a determining factor influencing their beliefs and conceptions of student engagement and its role in the EFL classes. Moreover, the results considered in totality suggest that even if the academic degree is to have any influence on teachers' use of student engagement, it happens when an academic degree is accompanied by high teaching experience.

If we take the string relationship between teachers' teaching experience and their preference for student engagement as evidence that teachers with more teaching experience are more aware of the causes and effects of student engagement, then, we can also take the findings of the current study as evidence supporting those in the previous studies which indicate that student engagement is highly correlated with better academic performance (e.g., Alamri, et al., 2020; Bonnell, 2021; Chui, 2022; Stewart, 2008; Wang & Holcombe, 2010), that increasing student engagement is a significant factor which reduces the rate of school dropout among students (e.g., Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Wang & Fredricks, 2014), and that higher levels of students' behavioral and emotional engagement significantly lower the rate of depression and delinquency and substance use (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2011).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provided evidence supporting the positive relationship between EFL teachers' teaching experience and their reliance on engaging their students in EFL learning activities. More specifically, the findings indicated that the relationships were different based on the academic degree and teaching experience of the participant EFL teachers and the subcomponents of student engagement. Generally speaking, the results showed that teaching

experience was the only variable that was significantly related to the behavioral and emotional categories of student engagement. Of course, the pattern of relationships between academic degree and the categories of student engagement closely replicated that of the relationship between teaching experience and student engagement categories. However, for an academic degree, the magnitude of the relationships did not reach statistical significance. The general conclusion drawn from the findings of this study is that EFL teachers' use of student engagement greatly depends on their teaching experience rather than their academic degree. Therefore, we should not equally expect all EFL teachers to pay due attention to student engagement and its effects in their classes because their views about student engagement are molded, to some extent, by their teaching experience. Instead, we would better look at their teaching experiences as factors influencing their perspective of students' role and nature in classroom procedures and activities.

One crucially important generalization based on the findings is that probably teaching experience by itself is not responsible for its relationship with student engagement. Instead, many other forms of theoretical and practical knowledge are acquired through experience, which directly or indirectly mediates between experience and other variables. However, for practicality considerations, this study was conducted on small samples. Therefore, to be more certain about the generalizability of the findings, further studies are needed with larger samples of subjects.

In addition, as the participants of this study were deliberately delimited to those EFL teachers who were teaching English in private English language institutes, a further suggestion would be to replicate the study on teachers and students from different educational settings, such as public schools as well as private institutes to see whether the same results would be obtained. As almost every other correlational study being carried out in an EFL context where the number of EFL students is limited, and there are strict confinements in finding sufficient numbers of participants, the present study has suffered the problem of finding a large number of

participants which would allow safe generalization of the research findings to the population in the Iranian context.

This study needed a combination of both EFL teachers and students as the research participants. This combination made it difficult to include more EFL teachers because, for each individual EFL teacher that would have been added to the teacher participants, a corresponding group of EFL students being taught in that teacher's class would have been required. Furthermore, making such accommodations was practically very difficult, if not impossible, as the number of teachers with separate groups of students in each context, private institutes, and public schools was limited. However, Second language teachers could benefit from the findings of this study by understanding that beliefs about the nature and significance of student engagement and student-centered classroom management are not fixed traits in language teachers but are shaped by other teacher characteristics, teaching experience being one of them. Therefore, it would differ greatly in which class a particular student is placed in and with which EFL teacher.

Disclosure statement

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