

## How Classroom Emotional Climate Shapes Motivation in University EFL Contexts: A Mediation Model of Teacher-Student Relationship and Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examines the mediating influence of teacher-student relationship (TSR) and perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS) in the association between classroom emotional climate (CEC) and learners' motivation (LM) among the Bangladeshi university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Applying a quantitative method, survey data were gathered from 250 EFL-centric learners and analysed through PLS-SEM and SPSS. The results highlight that CEC significantly influences TSR and PTAS, both of which, in turn, positively impact LM. Moreover, TSR and PTAS have partial mediation in the link between CEC and LM. The study extends motivational theory in the context of EFL by underscoring relational, emotional, and autonomy-assisted classroom procedures and provides practical implications for promoting a motivating learning atmosphere in higher education.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In Bangladesh, English is profoundly integrated in university life as a pathway to academic reading, career mobility, and research communication. National policy clearly positions English as a mandatory subject at the degree level and confirms English as a medium-of-instruction in higher study context alongside Bangla, focusing the expectation that university students can perform and learn through English (Karim et al., 2023). In the same vein, the wider economic and social impact of English in Bangladesh has been strengthened through international communication demands and globalization, making English as a Foreign Language (EFL) competency a crucial necessity rather than an elective expertise (Rahman et al., 2019). Notwithstanding, referring to Chowdhury et al. (2021), in many tertiary EFL classrooms, sustained student motivation remains fragile because of fear of negative evaluation, anxiety, perceived difficulty of academic English, and uneven participation. This makes it significant to investigate not merely what teachers teach, but also the classroom conditions through which motivation is strengthened or weakened.

One promising lens is classroom emotional climate (CEC), which reflects learners' shared perceptions of the emotional-interpersonal atmosphere of classroom interactions, including how teachers notice students' emotional needs and respond to them in supportive or aversive ways (McLure et al., 2022). Prior researchers like Alonso-Tapia and Ruiz-Díaz (2022) and Garcia-Peinado (2023) links CEC to students' adaptation, satisfaction, and motivational processes, indicating that the emotional tone of teacher-student interactions can shape how learners engage with learning tasks. However, motivational evidence in EFL contexts is often developed in parallel streams rather than integrated models (Meng, 2021). A study conducted by Tao et al. (2022) commonly examine direct effects of teacher support or learning climate on engagement, but less frequently clarify the mechanisms that translate a positive (or negative) emotional climate into motivation. Two mechanisms are especially relevant. First, the teacher-student relationship (TSR) captures closeness, trust, and low conflict in the instructional relationship (Henry & Thorsen, 2019); meta-analytic evidence of Lei et al. (2023) indicates that more positive TSRs are reliably associated with stronger student engagement and related outcomes, suggesting relational quality is a core pathway through which classroom experiences become motivationally meaningful. Second, perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS) captures whether learners experience teachers as acknowledging perspectives, providing meaningful rationales and choice, and using invitational language. Autonomy-supportive teaching is a central motivational style in self-determination theory and is consistently linked with stronger internalized and intrinsic motivation; EFL studies likewise show that autonomy-supportive climates are positively associated with engagement and achievement-related outcomes in language classrooms.

Despite these advances, an important gap remains in the Bangladeshi university EFL context. Research has not sufficiently tested an integrated, theory-consistent pathway in which CEC operates as an upstream classroom condition that shapes both TSR and PTAS, which then predict learners'

motivation (LM). This gap matters since practice and policy in the higher education in Bangladesh growingly consider English performance and readiness, but motivational resources of students are not distributed evenly, and classroom environments can either increase or decrease such differences. By integrating TSR, CEC, PTAS, and LM into a single mediational model, the current research provides a more comprehensible explanation of how emotional–interpersonal classroom contexts are transformed into motivational results – evidence that is actionable for course design and teacher development.

The current study aims at examining the correlations among TSR, CEC, PTAS, and LM among the EFL learners of universities. In particular, it explores the influence of CEC on TSR and PTAS, and the direct influence of TSR and PTAS on LM. Additionally, this research tests the mediational influence of TSR and PTAS in the link between CEC and LM. By implying these direct as well as indirect pathways, our research intends to offer a wide-ranging comprehension of how emotionally-supportive classroom environments transform into motivational results in higher-education EFL perspectives.

The present study makes key practical and theoretical contributions to the scholarly literature on LM and EFL education context. Theoretically, it advances self-determination and motivational perspectives by operationalizing CEC as an upstream contextual antecedent that impacts LM indirectly through autonomy-supportive (PTAS) and relational (TSR) channels. With the integration of interpersonal, motivational, and emotional constructs within a unified mediation model, this research moves beyond fragmented frameworks and provides a process-oriented description of motivational development in higher-education EFL contexts. It also extends current theory by offering empirical proof from Bangladesh, an under-researched area in motivation study, thereby augmenting the cross-cultural and contextual pertinence of motivational theory. Practically, the results provide practical insights for EFL teachers, policymakers, and university administration by underscoring the critical function of emotionally-supportive classrooms in reinforcing autonomy support, relational quality, and LM. These findings can improve classroom practices, teacher training, and institutional strategies aimed to improve student persistence, engagement, English competence, and results that are closely associated with employability and academic success in developing higher-education settings.

The remaining parts of the manuscript is arranged in the following: the next part presents the relevant literature reviews and develops the study hypotheses; the subsequent part introduces the methodology (participants, measures, and analytical strategy); the following part reports the findings; and the final parts discuss findings, implications for EFL pedagogy and policy, limitations, and directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Self-Determination Theory

Ryan and Deci (2000) developed the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), that describes the influence of social situations on the quality of motivation in individuals through facilitation or frustrations of three primary psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The application of SDT in education is broad since the theory elucidates why students get more autonomously motivated when instructors establish favourable interpersonal and instructional connections. According to SDT, classroom environments that are emotionally safe, respectful and encouraging inspire a sense of belonging and volition to the learners and this promotes engagement and persistence. In the current study, SDT is used to provide the theoretical interpretation of the relationship between Classroom Emotional Climate (CEC) and Learners Motivation (LM) in two essential ways namely Teacher student relationship (TSR) is used to illustrate the fulfilment of relatedness and Perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS) is used to illustrate the contextual support of autonomy. Therefore, CEC will reinforce TSR and PTAS, which will in turn boost LM among the EFL learners at the Bangladeshi university.

### Classroom Emotional Climate and Teacher-Student Relationships

A positive classroom emotional climate (CEC) is expected to strengthen teacher-student relationships (TSR) because emotional climates are co-constructed through recurring interpersonal interactions that signal care, respect, and psychological safety (McLure et al., 2022). According to Rucinski et al. (2018), when students perceive the classroom as warm, supportive, and low in threat, they are more likely to trust the teacher, communicate openly, and engage in cooperative behaviors that foster relational closeness. Conversely, emotionally negative climates characterized by tension or fear can heighten defensiveness, reduce participation, and increase relational distance (Ma et al., 2023). Scholarly work of Becker-Kurz and Morris (2015) in educational psychology indicates that emotionally supportive learning environments facilitate students' feelings of connectedness and belonging, which are foundational for high-quality TSR. In addition, attachment- and social support-based perspectives suggest that teachers' sensitivity and responsiveness to learners' emotional needs promote security and mutual respect, thereby improving relationship quality (Garcia-Peinado, 2023). Therefore, a more positive CEC should be positively associated with TSR among university EFL learners.

H1: CEC is positively associated with TSR.

### Classroom Emotional Climate and Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support

A positive classroom emotional climate, characterized by warmth, respect, emotional safety, and supportive teacher-student interactions, is positively associated with perceived teacher autonomy support, as evidenced by self-determination theory (SDT) (Wang, 2024). SDT posits that emotionally supportive environments fulfil students' basic psychological needs, particularly relatedness, which creates conditions conducive to autonomy-supportive teaching practices such as providing meaningful choices, rationales for activities, and opportunities for self-initiation (Salami & Althaqafi, 2023).

Empirical studies of Han and Huang (2022) demonstrate that teachers in emotionally warm classrooms offer more developmentally appropriate autonomy opportunities, leading students to perceive higher levels of autonomy support. For instance, observed teacher emotional support early in the academic year predicts mid-year increases in students' experiences of autonomy and positive peer relatedness, which in turn enhance motivation and engagement (Sixia & Mustapha, 2024). Referring to the study by Salami and Althaqafi (2023) on EFL contexts, such supportive climates similarly promote autonomy-supportive behaviours, fostering greater student perceptions of teacher facilitation of volitional learning. Thus, a favourable emotional climate is theorized to strengthen perceptions of teacher autonomy support.

H2: CEC is positively associated with PTAS.

### **Teacher-Student Relationship and Learners' Motivation**

Teacher-student relationship (TSR) is theorized to positively predict learners' motivation because relational quality shapes students' sense of belonging, competence, and willingness to engage in academic tasks (Moskowitz et al., 2022). Educational and motivational research by Meng (2021) consistently shows that when learners perceive their relationship with the teacher as caring, respectful, and supportive, they are more likely to invest effort, persist through difficulty, and adopt mastery-oriented goals. High-quality TSR can reduce anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, increase classroom participation, and encourage risk-taking—processes that are particularly relevant in EFL learning where speaking and performance concerns are common (Henry & Thorsen, 2019). From self-determination and social support perspectives, Akram and Li (2024) opined that teachers who build trusting relationships satisfy students' needs for relatedness and emotional security, which facilitates internalization of learning goals and stronger autonomous motivation. Past researchers (Ma et al., 2023) report positive link of TSR with higher academic motivation and engagement, lending support to the positive TSR-motivation relationship.

H3: TSR is positively associated with LM.

### **Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support and Learners' Motivation**

In accordance with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2019), perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS)—defined by providing rationales for tasks, meaningful choices, and opportunities for volitional involvement—fulfils fundamental psychological needs of students for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, thereby promoting higher degrees of autonomous motivation, specifically identified and intrinsic regulation. Past scholars like Ng and Wu (2024) and Zhao and Qin (2021) demonstrates a positive association between PTAS and students' autonomous motivation, with moderate to large effect sizes, while showing negligible or negative links to controlled motivation. In university and EFL contexts, this relationship manifests as enhanced intrinsic motivation, engagement, persistence, and academic outcomes, as students who perceive greater autonomy support experience increased volition and interest in learning (Ma et al., 2026; Wang, 2024). Thus, PTAS is theorized to positively

predict learners' motivation, underpinning the hypothesized relationship in this study.

H4: PTAS is positively associated with LM.

#### **Mediating Role of Teacher-Student Relationship**

Teacher-student relationship (TSR) is likely to mediate the link between classroom emotional climate (CEC) and learners' motivation (LM) because emotional climates shape the quality of daily interpersonal exchanges through which motivational resources are transmitted. In emotionally supportive classrooms, teachers' warmth, fairness, and responsiveness foster trust, closeness, and low conflict, thereby strengthening TSR (Garcia-Peinado, 2023; McLure et al., 2022). In turn, strong TSR enhances LM by increasing relatedness and psychological security, reducing anxiety, and encouraging participation and persistence—mechanisms that are especially salient in EFL settings where communication risk is high (Moskowitz et al., 2022). Theoretically, Akram and Li (2024) contended that social support and attachment-informed perspectives suggest that supportive climates promote secure relational bonds, while self-determination theory emphasizes that relatedness satisfaction through TSR facilitates internalization of learning goals and more self-determined motivation. Empirical studies also indicate that CEC predicts relationship quality and that TSR is associated with engagement and motivational outcomes (Ma et al., 2023), supporting a TSR-mediated CEC-LM pathway.

H5: TSR plays a mediating role in the association between CEC and LM.

#### **Mediating Role of Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support**

A positive classroom emotional climate (CEC), characterized by supportive interactions, emotional safety, and warmth, promotes conditions that facilitate teachers to offer autonomy-supportive functions, namely providing encouragement, rationales, and choices for self-initiation, thereby improving perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS) of students (Han & Huang, 2022; Wang, 2024). This PTAS, in turn, meets learners' main psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, augmenting higher autonomous motivation, such as identified regulation and intrinsic interest (Ng & Wu, 2024; Zhao & Qin, 2021). Empirical findings from longitudinal research conducted by Sixia and Mustapha (2024) showed that emotional support of teachers indirectly enhances student engagement and motivation through perceived autonomy support, with positive mediating impacts observed in university and adolescent contexts. In EFL settings, similar results of Salami and Althaqafi (2023) showed that emotionally supportive climates bolster autonomy perceptions, which positively predict motivation and related outcomes. Thus, PTAS is hypothesized to positively mediate the relationship between CEC and learners' motivation.

H6: PTAS plays a mediating role in the association between CEC and LM.

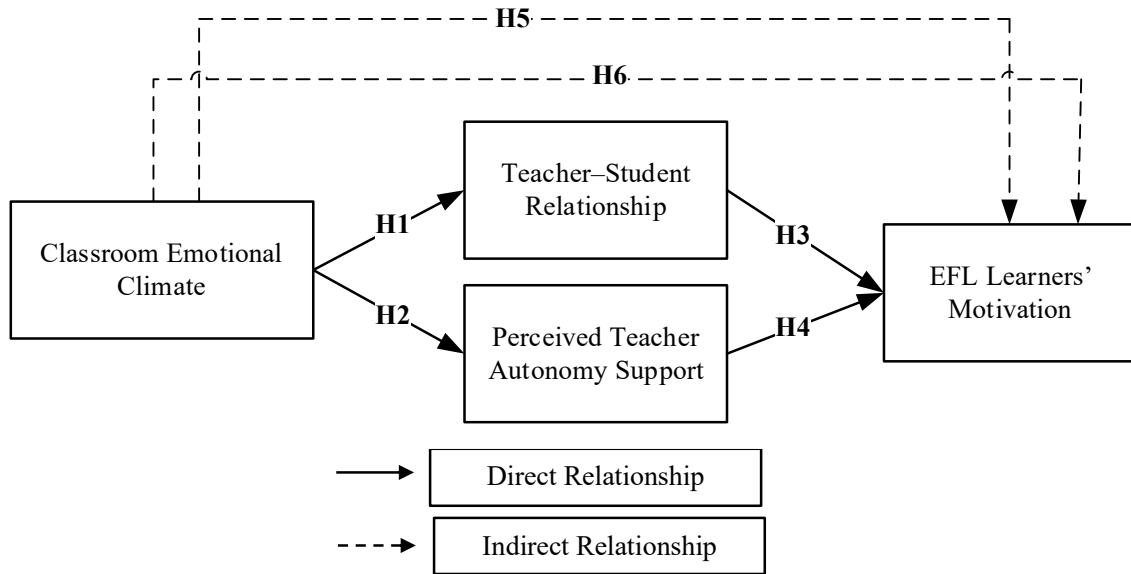


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sampling

University EFL students were selected as respondents because they constitute a theoretically relevant population for examining how classroom socio-emotional conditions translate into motivational outcomes in language learning. In tertiary EFL contexts, sustained motivation is pivotal for engagement, willingness to communicate, and persistence, while students' perceptions of classroom emotional climate, teacher-student relationships, and autonomy-supportive teaching are proximal determinants of motivational regulation. EFL classrooms also involve frequent performance and interaction demands (e.g., speaking, feedback, evaluation), making relational and emotional processes particularly salient for learners' motivation. A non-probability, purposive sampling approach was applied because a complete sampling frame of EFL students across all private universities in Bangladesh was not practically accessible, and institutional access constraints limited the feasibility of probability-based selection. Purposive sampling therefore enabled the inclusion of information-rich cases that met predefined criteria (i.e., enrolled university EFL learners) and allowed efficient data collection across multiple institutions while aligning with the study's explanatory objectives.

Given the study's multi-approach design, we applied several sample-size determination methods so the results would remain robust, accurate, and defensible, and to minimize the risk of underpowered hypothesis testing overall. First, we employed the G\*Power procedure to estimate the minimum sample needed for this investigation. Assuming an effect size of 0.05, power of 0.95, and a single directional path to the endogenous construct, the minimum required sample was 107. In addition, Kock and Hadaya (2018) and Hair et al. (2011) suggest that, for PLS-SEM, robust outcomes typically require at least 100–150 respondents. Considering these notions together, our study set the

target sample at 250 to reinforce the reliability and validity of this survey-focused, cross-sectional study.

### **Data Collection**

We collected data from Master's and Bachelor's level EFL students enrolled in the English departments of various higher education institutions in Bangladesh. Initially, we approached the heads of departments through professional and personal networks and sought institutional help by applying an authorization letter to get easy access for collecting data. After getting permission, the departmental heads assisted the questionnaire administration process by aligning with related classes and supporting the distribution and return of finished questionnaires from qualified students.

Data collection was carried out in English employing a survey-based, structured questionnaire. A cover letter was attached with each survey instrument to illustrate the research objectives, assure respondents that their responses would be kept confidential and would be applied merely for academic goals, and highlight that involvement was voluntary and that students could refuse with no negative outcomes. Our research adopted a cross-sectional study technique, whereby all measures were obtained at a single-point in time. Such a technique was suitable since this research sought to investigate correlations among teacher-student relationship, classroom emotional climate, perceived teacher autonomy support, and learners' motivation without manipulating constructs or tracking changes over time.

### **Measurement**

A questionnaire of 33 items was utilized to investigate teacher-student relationship (TSR), perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS), classroom emotional climate (CEC), and learners' motivation (LM). The constructs' measurement model was grounded in instruments verified by recognized past studies. Johnson et al. (2007) advocated a commonly applied six-item standard scale for measuring CEC. In addition, TSR was assessed employing nine items borrowed from the scale of Pianta and Nimetz (2001). The overall instrument showed the internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ), which is acceptable. A six-item scale of Hardre and Reeve (2003) was used to assess PTAS. The analysis of Reliability implied that this scale demonstrated very high consistency ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ). A scale of twelve items was adapted from Vallerand et al. (1989) to measure LM, and the construct exhibited high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

We analysed the Data applying SPSS and partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. Firstly, SPSS was utilized for the purpose of coding, data entry, and preliminary screening to make sure that the dataset was suitable and clean for the next modelling. In order to investigate potential common method variance (CMV), the single-factor test of Harman was used; the findings demonstrated that a single factor did not account for the majority of variance, indicating that CMV did not pose a major threat in the dataset. Next, PLS-SEM was performed in SmartPLS 4 to specify and validate the measurement model, estimate structural paths among Teacher-Student Relationship, Classroom Emotional Climate, Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support, and Learners' Motivation, and test the proposed hypotheses. PLS-SEM

was considered appropriate because it is well-suited for theory development and prediction-oriented research, can estimate complex models with multiple latent constructs and relationships simultaneously, and is robust under less restrictive distributional assumptions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Respondents' Demographic Details

The survey included 250 respondents, predominantly females (67%), with males comprising 33%. Most participants (58%) were aged 21–23 years, followed by 24–26 years (22%). The majority were in Honours 3rd year (35%) and 4th year (29%). More than half (56%) of the respondents had been learning English for more than 10 years. The highest group studied English Language Teaching (38%), followed by Translation (16%), Linguistics (20%), and English Literature (26%). This suggests a female-majority and young sample of advanced undergraduate English majors with adequate English learning experience.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Details

Characteristics	N	%
Gender	N	%
Female	167	67
Male	83	33
Age	N	%
21 - 23 years	145	58
24 - 26 years	55	22
27 - 29 years	32	13
30 or Higher	18	7
Year of Study / Academic Level	N	%
Honours 1st year	28	11
Honours 2nd year	47	19
Honours 3rd year	88	35
Honours 4th year	72	29
Master's	15	6
Years of Learning English	N	%
Less than 5 years	28	11
5-10 years	82	33
More than 10 years	140	56
Major / Program of Study	N	%
English Language Teaching	95	38
English Literature	65	26
Linguistics	50	20
Translation	40	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Model Assessment

The data analysis was done applying Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS4, in conformity with the recommendations of Hair et al. (2017). This strategy provides key advantages, incorporating maximizing the explained variance of endogenous variables, enabling the estimation of both formative and reflective measurement frameworks, and accommodating complex framework structures (Hair et al., 2017). With reference to the suggested hypotheses, a two-stage method was adopted following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). As a result, the first stage included measuring the measurement model for validity and reliability, whereas the subsequent stage explored the structural model to validate the hypothesized associations of the study (Henseler et al., 2016). Finally, in line with Hair et al. (2017) A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was carried out to assess the path coefficients' significance and the corresponding factor loadings.

#### Test of the Measurement Model

Based on the guidelines of Henseler et al. (2016), Associations among the variables were measured by indicator reliability, internal consistency, and discriminant and convergent validity. At the initial stage, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, composite reliability (CR), and factor loadings were computed following the recommendations of Ringle et al. (2012). The results fulfilled the widely accepted threshold criteria suggested by past scholars (see Table 2). Based on the standard guidelines of Hair et al. (2017) and Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the study results supported the measurement model, since all CR values were higher than 0.80 and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70.

In agreement with Henseler et al. (2016), the examination of convergent validity was done applying average variance extracted (AVE). Each construct's AVE values were greater than the minimum cut-off value of 0.50, thereby affirming sufficient convergent validity (Table 2)

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Variables	AVE (>0.5)	CR (>0.8)	Cronbach's Alpha (>0.7)
Classroom Emotional Climate	0.627	0.823	0.772
Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support	0.616	0.852	0.848
Teacher-Student Relationship	0.532	0.871	0.851
EFL Learners' Motivation	0.591	0.817	0.714

**Note(s):** CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted.

In consistency with Henseler et al. (2015), this study computed the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, a criterion for evaluating the discriminant validity. As advocated by Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT values should be less than 0.85 threshold to exhibit satisfactory level of discriminant validity. The HTMT outputs validated discriminant validity since all ratios fell below 0.85 across the constructs, as reported in Table 3.

Table 3. The Method of HTMT

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Teacher-Student Relationship				
2. Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support	0.571			
3. EFL Learners' Motivation	0.425	0.627		
4. Classroom Emotional Climate	0.376	0.731	0.682	

### Test of the Structural Model

After setting up validity and reliability of the measurement model, this study subsequently assessed the structural model. Following the guidance of Hair et al. (2017), the PLS bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples was used to the complete model to obtain corresponding t-statistics with path estimates. Due to the existence of directional hypotheses, significance was estimated employing a one-tailed test.

Accordingly, H1 and H2 were supported, as Table 4 shows significant positive effects of CEC on TSR ( $\beta = 0.248$ ,  $t = 4.863$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and PTAS ( $\beta = 0.337$ ,  $t = 8.641$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The findings also reveal that TSR ( $\beta = 0.372$ ,  $t = 7.750$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and PTAS ( $\beta = 0.269$ ,  $t = 5.075$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) positively predicts LM, thus supporting H3 and H4.

To investigate whether PTAS and TSR served as significant mediating variables, 5,000 bootstrapping resamples were applied, in agreement with Preacher and Hayes (2008). Table 4 also indicates that TSR strongly mediates the CEC-LM relationship ( $\beta = 0.136$ ,  $t = 3.317$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H5. Furthermore, PTAS significantly mediates the link between CEC and LM ( $\beta = 0.184$ ,  $t = 5.935$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), thereby supporting H6

Table 4. The Findings of Hypotheses Testing (Direct and Indirect Associations)

Hypotheses	Association	Beta	SE	t-value	Decision
H1	CEC → TSR (Direct)	0.248	0.051	4.863	Supported
H2	CEC → PTAS (Direct)	0.337	0.039	8.641	Supported
H3	TSR → LM (Direct)	0.372	0.048	7.750	Supported
H4	PTAS → LM (Direct)	0.269	0.053	5.075	Supported
H5	CEC → TSR → LM (Indirect)	0.136	0.041	3.317	Supported
H6	CEC → PTAS → LM (Indirect)	0.184	0.031	5.935	Supported

**Note(s):** CEC= Classroom Emotional Climate, TSR= Teacher-Student Relationship, PTAS= Perceived Teacher Autonomy Support, LM= Learners' Motivation.

The findings specify a statistically supported positive link between Classroom Emotional Climate (CEC) and teacher-student relationships (TSR), reinforcing the suggested hypothesis that a more positive CEC aligns with stronger relational quality. This result is consistent with Garcia-Peinado (2023) and Ma et al. (2023), indicate that classrooms characterized by respect, warmth,

and emotional safety likely promote open communication, trust, and mutual understanding, which in turn, strengthen support from teachers and students' perceived closeness. A positive climate not only enhance students' willingness to engage, but also lessen interpersonal conflict, thereby facilitating more constructive and frequent interactions that strengthen relationship development (Becker-Kurz & Morris, 2015; Rucinski et al., 2018). This interpretation corresponds with past study of McLure et al. (2022) demonstrating that well-managed and supportive classroom environments are associated with higher-quality TSR, as students are likely to perceive teachers as more responsive and caring in emotionally positive contexts, while teachers are better able to involve students when the classroom atmosphere is encouraging and calm. Taken together, these convergent results highlight the notion that emotional climate acts as a basic condition through which strong TSR are fostered.

The analysis of data disclosed a positive association between classroom emotional climate (CEC) and perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS), supporting the study hypothesis. This result suggests that a warmer and more supportive emotional atmosphere in the classroom augments students' perceptions of teachers acknowledging feelings, providing choices, and encouraging self-directed learning (Sixia & Mustapha, 2024). The finding corresponds with Self-Determination (SD) Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2019), indicating that positive emotional communications enhance the satisfaction of psychological needs of students, specifically autonomy. Prior study conducted by Wang (2024), have similarly reported that emotionally supportive classrooms contribute to greater autonomy opportunities, with PTAS mediating the association between teacher emotional support and student engagement/motivation. The findings from past literature (Han & Huang, 2022; Salami & Althaqafi, 2023) reinforce our study results, underscoring the interconnected impact of CEC in enhancing autonomy-supportive teaching functions and overall well-being of students.

The data analysis exposed a positive and significant association between teacher-student relationships and EFL learners' motivation, thus confirming our proposed hypothesis. This indicates that if students perceive their instructors as fair, supportive, and emotionally available, they tend to invest more efforts, participate actively, and persist through challenges, due to the fact that a trusting link can reduce language anxiety, enhance confidence, and make classroom goals perceive personally relevant (Akram & Li, 2024; Henry & Thorsen, 2019). This notion is in agreement with prior researchers (Ma et al., 2023; Moskowitz et al., 2022), which posits that supportive associations strengthen autonomous motivation and meet learners' need for relatedness, and it corresponds with L2 motivation scholarship demonstrating that perceived teacher support and positive teacher-learner connection are relevantly related to sustained motivational intensity and greater involvement. Altogether, these related results highlight that relational quality is a cardinal motivational resource in EFL learning settings.

The analysis of data validated a positive association between perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS) and learners' motivation in EFL context,

lending support to the study hypothesis. This result is in conformity with Zhao and Qin (2021), suggest that when EFL learners perceive their instructors as minimizing control, acknowledging perspectives, and providing choices, they experience increased autonomous and intrinsic motivation, contributing to higher persistence and engagement in learning English. These results are in accordance with SD Theory, which reveals that fulfilling the fundamental psychological need for autonomy promotes self-determined motivation, which is necessary for sustained acquisition of language (Wang, 2024). A number of past research in EFL settings like Ma et al. (2026) and Ng and Wu (2024) have demonstrated similar results; for example, study on the EFL students of Singapore and China shows that PTAS positively influences engagement, autonomous motivation, and learning outcomes. These pertinent findings from past studies strongly support the present findings, focusing on the crucial impact of autonomy-supportive teaching in promoting EFL motivation.

The findings demonstrate that teacher-student relationship (TSR) significantly plays a mediating role in the link between Classroom Emotional Climate and learners' motivation (LM) in EFL context, suggesting that a positive classroom atmosphere predicts LM to a great extent through enhanced relational quality with teachers. This indicates that when classrooms are psychologically safe, emotionally supportive, and respectful, learners are more likely to perceive teachers as responsive and caring, experience greater trust, and communicate more openly (McLure et al., 2022), which in turn improves engagement, persistence, and effort in language learning (Ma et al., 2023). This mechanism is aligned with SD Theory, which advocates that supportive atmosphere induces motivation by meeting the relatedness need (Moskowitz et al., 2022), and it corresponds with classroom study highlighting that emotionally positive contexts enable supportive TSR that influence stronger engagement and motivational outcomes (Garcia-Peinado, 2023; Meng, 2021). As a result, past evidence correlates with the current finding by emphasizing relational procedures as a main channel through which classroom emotional conditions transform into higher motivation among EFL learners.

The analysis corroborated that perceived teacher autonomy support (PTAS) plays a mediating role in the association between Classroom Emotional Climate and EFL learners' motivation (LM), verifying the study hypothesis. This indicates that a supportive, warm, and positive emotional classroom environment predicts learners' perceptions of teachers offering autonomy (e.g., acknowledgment and choices of perspectives) (Salami & Althaqafi, 2023), which in turn promotes greater autonomous and intrinsic motivation for English learning (Zhao & Qin, 2021). These findings conform to SD Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2019), where emotional support fulfills psychological needs, in particular autonomy, contributing to increased LM (Han & Huang, 2022). Similar findings were reported by past researchers, namely Sixia and Mustapha (2024), concluded that observed teacher emotional support induces learners through mediating influence of PTAS (together with peer relatedness), impacting behavioral engagement and learning motivation. Relatedly, same mediation mechanisms appear in EFL settings centered on the research of Ma et al. (2026),

where teacher support (involving emotional aspects) predicts motivation and engagement through autonomy-linked channels. These relevant results from past research strongly support the present findings, strengthening the sequential mechanism from emotional climate to autonomy support to enhanced EFL motivation.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

To conclude, the current study exhibits that classroom emotional climate makes significant contributions in enhancing EFL learners' motivation (LM) in Bangladeshi universities through its mediating influence on perceived teacher autonomy support and teacher-student relationships. The results validate that emotionally supportive classroom contexts nurture greater autonomy support and stronger interpersonal linkage, which in turn promote motivational orientations of learners. Through empirical validation of a combined mediation model, this research extends self-determination and motivational viewpoints within the higher education EFL context and emphasizes the essentiality of emotional-relational classroom procedures. The stated findings indicate that fostering LM necessitates attention not merely to instructional strategies but also to the relational and emotional quality of classroom interactions. On the whole, the current research provides contextually relevant and theoretically grounded insights for policymakers as well as educators who seek to develop engagement and sustained motivation in university EFL contexts.

On the basis of the study findings, the research provides recommendations that university EFL-based programs deliberately place priority on developing a supportive classroom emotional climate (CEC) defined by psychological safety, respect, and warmth, as such conditions have direct impact on strengthening teacher-student relationships and enhancing perceived teacher autonomy support. Teachers ought to be motivated to follow emotionally responsive pedagogical functions, involving empathy, active listening, consistent support, and fairness, to accelerate respectful and trustful linkages with learners, which in turn strengthen their motivation. Likewise, professional development programs should be initiated to train EFL teachers in autonomy-supportive teaching techniques, namely acknowledging students' perspectives, providing meaningful choices, encouraging self-initiated learning, and offering constructive feedback. Curriculum designers and university administrators should combine relational and emotional aspects into evaluation systems, teacher training, and classroom observation models, acknowledging their indirect but major influence on learners' motivation. Moreover, institutional practices should assist flexible instructional methods and manageable class sizes that permit instructors to pay attention to motivational and emotional needs of learners. By consistently emphasizing CEC through autonomy-assisted and relational policies, higher education institutions can more effectively enhance engagement, motivational resources, and overall learning outcomes of EFL learners.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study acknowledges a number of limitations that should be considered when explaining its results. First and foremost, we drew the sample exclusively from EFL learners enrolled in higher education private institutions in Bangladesh, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to public institutions, different cultural and national contexts, or learners in other academic fields. Second, the cross-sectional procedure captures perceptions at a single-point in time and therefore limits causal inference among classroom emotional climate (CEC), the proposed mediators, and learners' motivation (LM). Future investigations should employ longitudinal designs to examine temporal ordering or experimental and quasi-experimental approaches to test causal effects more rigorously. Third, although teacher-student relationship and perceived teacher autonomy support were modelled as mediating mechanisms, additional psychological and contextual processes may also explain how CEC influences LM. Future research could extend the model by examining alternative or complementary mediators, such as organizational commitment and career satisfaction, to provide a more comprehensive account. Fourth, the study relied solely on student perceptions, omitting the perspectives of EFL teachers/instructors and university management; subsequent work should incorporate multi-source data to reduce single-informant bias and enrich interpretation. Finally, given the limited evidence on this topic in non-Western contexts, comparative cross-cultural studies contrasting Western and non-Western settings are recommended to clarify whether the direct and indirect pathways differ across cultures.

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