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Cognitive and Emotional Resilience among English Language Teachers: Exploring Stress Management and Motivation in EMI Settings

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ABSTRACT

The growing phenomenon of English-medium instruction (EMI) in Gulf higher education has raised cognitive, emotional, and motivational stakes for English language teachers with limited systematic institutional support. Hence, it is pertinent to investigate how English language teachers are responding to these challenges. Despite the existing research on teacher stress and emotional labor, few empirical studies have explored intervention-based research among English language teachers in Gulf EMI settings. This study focused on the effect of a self-determination-oriented socio-academic intervention on the cognitive and emotional resilience, stress management, motivation, and speaking proficiency of English language teachers. Employing a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design, 64 university-level English language teachers in Saudi Arabia participated and were randomly distributed into experimental and control groups. An adapted speaking proficiency rubric and a cognitive and emotional stability scale were used to collect the data, which were then analyzed through independent-samples t-tests. The

results revealed significant post-test differences in favor of the experimental group on all outcome variables. The results highlight the importance of autonomy-supportive institutional practices and structured professional support in EMI settings and provide a context-sensitive intervention framework that may serve similar educational settings. Future studies should explore the longitudinal impact of the intervention and test the intervention model in other EMI contexts.

Keywords: English medium instruction, teacher resilience, self-determination theory, cognitive and emotional regulation, Gulf higher education

INTRODUCTION

The term emotional labor was originally coined by Hochschild in the early 1980s as the processes by which employees were required to manage, control, and mask their feelings in order to meet the emotional norms of an organization and society (Hochschild, 2012). This concept refers to the degree to which employees adjust their outward display of emotion to match the feeling rules. The individual also articulated the notion that feeling rules constitute a set of moral expectations regarding emotional expression, which organizations may deploy as a mechanism for controlling personnel. Furthermore, these rules can serve as criteria for evaluating the performance of individuals within the workplace. In organizations, individuals often try to match their emotional expressions with the expectations of others in order to be able to keep their professionalism and be accepted by their colleagues and managers.

In the field of language teaching and learning, the role of the teacher's emotions has received more attention in recent years (e.g., Blake & Dewaele, 2022). Drawing on Hochschild's (1983) conceptualization of emotional labor, Benesch (2017) revisited the construct of ELT in the context of language teaching and posited that the power dynamics between teachers and institutions are not fixed. Instead, teachers can resist and change them. Benesch's use of the term emotions rather than emotional labor suggests a more positive and empowering approach to ELT. In another recent study, Nazari and Karimpour (2022) explored the impact of organizational factors on ELT and identity of English language teachers and found that ELT, in terms of the management of the pedagogical conflicts, care-oriented ELT, and the resistance of the ELT, shapes their teacher identity. Institutional quality enhancement in English language education has previously been approached through organizational and management-oriented frameworks, such as strategic analysis and capacity development (Aziz et al., 2010), while more recent research has shifted attention toward teacher-centered psychological and professional support in EMI contexts.

In GCC countries, English language teaching is typically foreign language teaching, which is associated with unique pedagogical and affective implications (Al-Wossab, 2024). EMI, on the other hand, has become increasingly popular at the tertiary level in some GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE (Alkahtany et al., 2016). EMI is part of education reform initiatives designed to

enable the local economy to compete more effectively in the global market through raising local higher education to international academic standards. EMI English language teachers assume a dual role as both language teachers and subject teachers, as they are expected to teach language skills and to facilitate improvement in the English language proficiency of their students for EMI purposes. Early reform efforts in college level teacher education centered on restructuring preparation models to be more reflective, contextualized, and psychologically informed (Ahmed & Aziz, 2007), a notion that has gained relevance in contemporary EMI settings. This dual role usually entails cognitive, emotional, and motivational demands that require EMI teachers to possess a higher level of resilience (Li, 2025).

Accordingly, the expansion of EMI in the Gulf is not merely a linguistic issue but an educational adjustment process. The policies in Gulf countries emphasize the importance of improving English language skills in education to address the mismatch between the perceived quality of local education with foreign education.

However, EMI has placed new demands on ELT professionals, such as a heavier workload, varying learner skills, and a complicated sociocultural classroom context, which are exacerbated by mixed classes and conflicting cultural understandings, all of which require teachers to remain emotionally stable, cognitively grounded, and motivated (Elyas & Al-Hoorie, 2024).

Though increasing research effort has been devoted to exploring the challenges of language teaching, the aforementioned studies have concentrated on pedagogical problems on the classroom level without delving into how EMI English language teachers respond to chronic emotional and cognitive pressures imposed by the EMI-predominant institutional contexts. Although a few studies have reported on the stressors of language teaching, few, if any, studies have explored the ways in which EMI English language teachers achieve resilience in response to the intertwined challenges of EMI, accountability, and teacher identity. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of the literature reveals a noticeable absence of intervention studies that specifically examine the emotional regulation, motivation, and resilience of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) teachers in the Gulf region (Tang, 2020; Siddiqui, 2022). This gap calls for further research to address the aforementioned issues and challenges in order to better understand the needs and support mechanisms of this demographic. To provide more insight into the ways EMI English language teachers can be empowered, research is needed to address the aforementioned knowledge gaps.

LITERATURE REVIEW

More recently, studies have explored how teacher resilience and emotional regulation may be linked to the teachers' ability to deal with extraordinary institutional pressure. For instance, in the UAE, Bryan and von Suchodoletz (2023) explored how resilience is related to burnout among expatriate teachers in the United Arab Emirates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a sample of 529 teachers surveyed at three time points, their results showed that positive

organizational climate was significantly associated with teacher resilience. Additionally, a supportive organizational climate buffered teacher burnout. This suggests that a positive work place climate may facilitate teachers' stress management and help teachers to deal with challenges, which, in turn, are likely to contribute to their well-being and job performance.

Going one step further, Zhang (2023) conducted a systematic review of the literature on teacher resilience (TR) and teacher well-being (TWB) and their association with foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE). The systematic review revealed that both resilience and well-being were multi-faceted and context-dependent, and that the same factors – such as self-efficacy, teacher–student relationships, collegial support, and positive classroom environments contributed to both. Moreover, the study found that both TR and TWB played a significant role in predicting teachers' enjoyment of teaching, thus lending support to the argument that emotion and motivation are an indispensable part of language teaching. Hajira et al. (2025) reported that integrating mobile-assisted language learning tools in preparatory year English programs positively influenced students' motivation and receptive skill development.

Another theme pertinent to teacher resilience in the Gulf is issues of pedagogy and policy. In a recent study, Mizyed and Eccles (2023) examined the barriers to enhancing Emirati teachers' teaching practices that facilitate the development of problem-solving abilities in young children. Low teacher self-efficacy and inadequate teacher professional training were identified as key obstacles to teaching practice. A professional development model to support teacher beliefs and practices was suggested to inform policies in reform-based education systems that are committed to shifting towards a knowledge economy.

Beyond the GCC countries, other EFL contexts have also explored the psychology of language teaching. In one study, Ismail et al. (2023) examined the relationships between emotional regulation, reflective teaching, self-efficacy, identity, and psychological well-being in a sample of 433 EFL teachers in China. The results showed that reflective teaching and emotional regulation were central to teachers' well-being, and thus suggested that emotional and motivational competence should be equally emphasized with pedagogical competence in teacher education programs. Recent teaching initiatives in Saudi EFL higher education have focused on empowering students and encouraging reflective academic practices (Rehman & Ahmed, 2023).

In addition to the learner-centered studies, intervention studies have further demonstrated the impact of the support provision on the improvement of language skills and the emotional development of EFL learners. For instance, in a quasi-experimental study in the Iranian context, Huang et al. (2024) investigated the effect of teacher support on EFL learners' language learning achievement, academic immunity, and enjoyment. The results of the study showed that the participants in the experimental group who received both instructional and emotional support outperformed the participants in the control group who received only conventional

teaching. While this study focused on the impacts on the students, it has implications for the emotional and regulation demands on the teachers in a supportive environment.

In Saudi Arabia, Alnefaie (2024) found that English language students and teachers still experience high levels of foreign language anxiety, which results from language-related, teaching-related, and testing-related factors. The study concluded that teacher education courses should include stress management and emotion regulation to reduce English language anxiety, and hence the significance of considering teachers' emotional states in teaching and education. Arshad et al. (2024) showed that using bilingual approaches in a planned way can help make teaching more effective. This supports wider conversations about adapting teaching methods in EMI and multilingual settings. Recent ethnographic research has highlighted the influential role of family dynamics and home language practices in shaping English language acquisition within multicultural households (Qaralleh et al., 2025). Rehman et al. (2025) found that a blended instructional approach combining face-to-face interaction with digital support improved EFL speaking performance more effectively than LMS-based instruction alone.

In sum, these studies emphasize the role of resilience, emotional regulation, and institutional support in facilitating teachers' psychological capital. However, there is a need for further research in the following areas: (a) the majority of the studies have targeted general classroom teachers and students' psychology and learning, whereas the number of studies exploring the EMI environment and the emotional demands on EFL teachers in the Gulf states are few; (b) theoretical perspectives, such as emotional labor theory (Benesch, 2012, 2017) and the transactional model of stress and coping, cannot fully clarify the specific cognitive, emotional, and motivational challenges of EFL teachers who are charged with developing students' skills to perform academically in EMI settings; and (c) there is a lack of intervention studies that have empirically tested the effects of theoretically-based socio-academic intervention on EFL teachers' resilience and teacher functioning in EMI settings. The present study aimed to explore the relationship between a self-determination-based socio-academic intervention and EFL teachers' cognitive and emotional resilience in an EMI setting in Saudi Arabia.

Objectives of the Study

This study was designed to investigate the degree to which a socio-academic intervention grounded in a self-determination framework can affect EFL teachers' cognitive and emotional resilience, stress coping, motivation and speaking performance in a Saudi EMI context. In particular, this study explored the degree to which an autonomy-supportive teaching environment is linked to EFL teachers' stress-coping and motivation-maintaining capabilities in the face of EMI-related teaching requirements. Furthermore, the study intended to identify institutional and professional development policy implications for improving EFL teachers' well-being and teaching effectiveness in EMI higher education settings.

Research Questions

To address the study objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1 To what extent do English language teachers in EMI settings experience cognitive and emotional challenges related to stress and motivation?

RQ2 Are there statistically significant differences in speaking proficiency and cognitive and emotional resilience between teachers who participate in a self-determination-based intervention and those who do not?

RQ3 How is participation in a socio-academic, autonomy-supportive intervention associated with changes in English language teachers' motivation and stress management in EMI contexts?

In investigating teacher resilience and emotional labor among Gulf EMI English language teachers, this study adds to an existing research literature on teacher resilience and emotional labor in higher education. It provides theoretical underpinnings and empirical data to inform teacher educators, university administrators, and policymakers to create a supportive teaching context for English language teachers in terms of well-being and pedagogic practice. The study also theoretically locates self-determination and emotional resilience within EMI-induced change. Moreover, the proposed supportive framework can be used as a model for Gulf institutions to support English language teachers' resilience in their efforts to cope with heightened cognitive and emotional challenges in multilingual and intercultural higher education settings.

Theoretical Framework

This research is underpinned by self-determination theory (SDT), a robust theoretical framework that explains the processes through which language teachers' motivation, resilience, and psychological well-being are fostered in the workplace (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT posits that individuals are inclined to develop and pursue self-actualization if they are granted the three inherent psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Fulfillment of the three innate psychological needs fosters intrinsic motivation, adaptive coping, and persistence in the face of adversity.

In the educational context, teachers' autonomy, competence, and relatedness are suggested as important factors in facilitating teacher motivation, emotional well-being, and managing work stress (e.g., Peng et al., 2017). In particular, teachers are more likely to manage stress and attain a higher level of emotional well-being when they are autonomous in their teaching, feeling competent in handling work requirements, and related with their colleagues and students. Fulfilling the three innate psychological needs enables individuals to construe challenging situations as chances for learning and development, rather than as threats to their well-being.

As a result, motivated behavior is guided by internalized goals and values, rather than controlled by external rewards and pressures. Recent studies in Saudi preparatory-year EFL programs have shown students' attitudes toward technology-

based instruction and learning platforms (Ahmed & Rehman, 202; Marissa & Hamid). These findings also point to wider changes in institutions that have changed teachers' roles in EMI-related settings.

Teacher education institutions and organizations also have a crucial role to play in promoting language teachers' self-determination by creating an autonomy-supportive environment, which facilitates their active involvement in the decision-making process, provides them with informative feedback, and acknowledges their autonomy (see Reeve, 2002). These social environments facilitate teachers' use of cognitive strategies and emotional regulation strategies, increase their psychological hardiness, and promote their interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues, especially in a stressful and challenging environment like EMI (Noels, 2001).

According to SDT, a self-determined person is one whose behavior is characterized by an experience of volition, is valued for its goal toward which the behavior is intended, and is accompanied by self-approval (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 32).

A self-determined language teacher, therefore, is someone who feels fully volitional when teaching English as a medium of instruction and endorses this professional behavior as a valued goal and chooses to teach EMI because it is consistent with his or her sense of self (Cherry, 2024). Rather than performing a behavior for external rewards, a self-determined language teacher is motivated to teach EMI because of the personal satisfaction and fulfillment derived from teaching this subject. The educator demonstrates a strong commitment to the instruction of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and actively identifies with the pedagogical responsibilities associated with this role. In the EMI classroom, where teachers encounter a high level of linguistic, cognitive, and emotional challenges, internal satisfaction is particularly important for maintaining motivation and commitment to teaching (e.g., Lamb, 2017). Qaralleh and Ahmed (2024) argued that using artificial intelligence tools together with backward design principles can make the curriculum more coherent in transnational English language programs.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework that underlies this research, showing how self-determination theory is associated with cognitive and emotional resilience in English language teachers. The framework was adapted from Noels (2001) and Noels and Chaffee (2016). In this framework, satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is hypothesized to promote language teachers' resilience through the mediating role of socio-academic vitality, which refers to the experience of feeling alive, motivated, and satisfied in the EMI classroom. This framework also shows that socio-academic vitality in the EMI classroom is fostered through teachers' positive and supportive relationships with students, their feelings of emotional satisfaction, intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for teaching EMI, and their level of engagement in academic activities in EMI classes. These psychological factors are argued to facilitate or undermine the teacher's experience of resilience in EMI contexts.

Figure 1: Heuristic Model of Cognitive and Emotional Vitality for Self-Determination

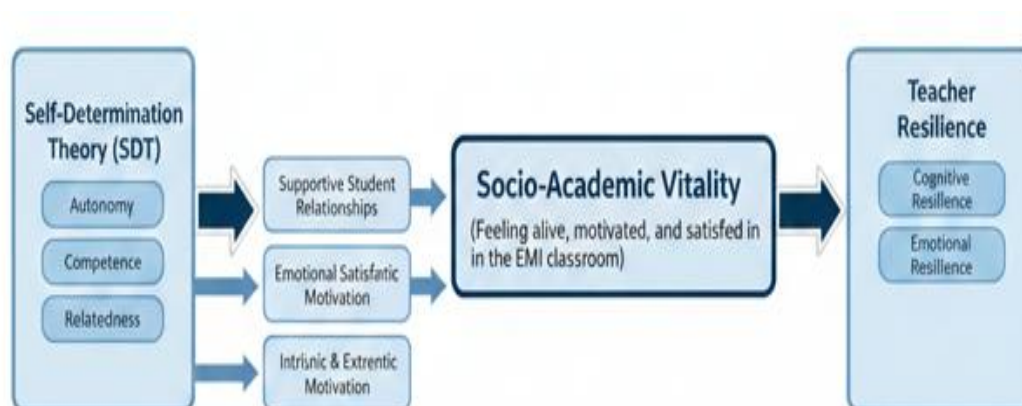


Figure 1 describes that language teachers' cognitive and emotional resilience can be sustained through socio-academic vitality. The language teachers' psychological well-being is directly connected to their professional relations, cognitive and emotional satisfaction, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and academic and professional engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design to investigate the effect of the intervention on English language teachers' speaking proficiency and cognitive and emotional resilience in the English-medium instruction (EMI) context. Such a design was employed because it was deemed the most appropriate for this study, as it enabled the researcher to compare the teachers in the experimental condition systematically (i.e., the self-determination-based socio-academic intervention) with those in the control condition (i.e., the routine institutional practices). The independent variable in this study was the socio-academic intervention, whereas the dependent variables included the English language teachers' speaking proficiency and their cognitive and emotional resilience, including stress management and motivation.

Procedure

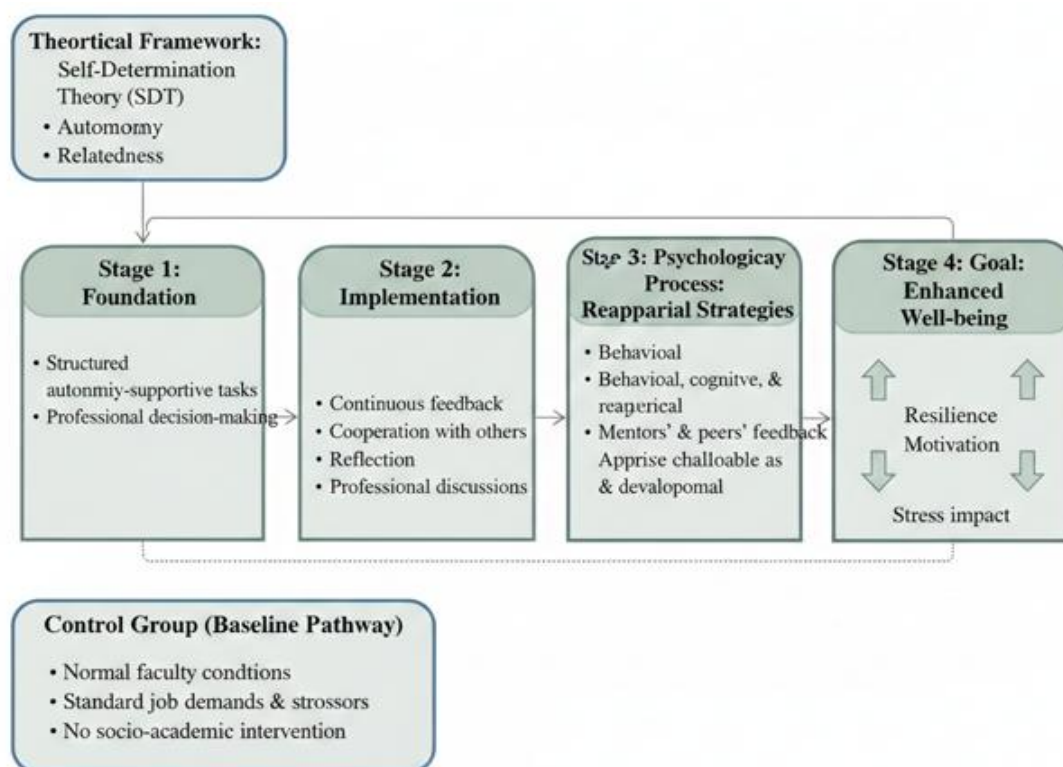
From the perspective of the heuristic model of cognitive and emotional well-being based on the self-determination theory, the socio-academic context intervention was planned and applied for the experimental group, in order to empower the teachers' cognitive and emotional well-being by enhancing their autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which might be useful to cope with stress and motivation in EMI contexts.

The intervention was applied in the context of a Saudi university during one semester. The classroom teachers in the intervention group received institutional and social support with the aim of fostering socio-academic vitality, including

structured autonomy-supportive tasks, professional decision-making, positive and continuous feedback, cooperation with others, and reflection. Moreover, the teachers were asked to be involved in professional discussions, to exchange classroom problems, and to discuss jointly how to cope with stress and how to maintain motivation. Recent scholarship has emphasized digital literacy as a fundamental right, particularly for marginalized groups facing gendered and structural barriers in access to education (Hamid et al., 2025).

Behavioral, cognitive, and emotional reappraisal strategies were employed to enhance academic/professional engagement. Specifically, mentors' and peers' feedback was designed to facilitate teachers' emotional regulation, perceived professional ability, and valued experience. These strategies aimed at enhancing psychological well-being and resilience by helping teachers to appraise the EMI challenges as controllable and serving a developmental purpose. Figure 2 presents the components and stages of the intervention applied to the experimental group.

Figure 2: Procedure of the Socio-Academic Intervention



By comparison, the control group was exposed to normal faculty conditions without any socio-academic intervention, feedback, or any intervention for self-determination and emotional resilience. Control group teachers implemented job demands and stress within the normal faculty conditions, as typically expected.

Controlling the Extraneous Variables

To mitigate extraneous variables and increase the internal validity of this study, the pretests for English language speaking ability and resilience of cognition

and emotion were conducted for both groups before the treatment. All participants of the current study were enrolled in the same institution, which implies that they were exposed to the same culture and curricula of the institution, and they were supposed to fulfill the same requirements. In addition, they were assigned to the same classroom environment, and the time of the class, students' language level, and materials were the same for both groups. These might mitigate the threats to internal validity.

After the intervention, both groups were post-tested to examine their English language speaking proficiency and cognitive and emotional resilience. Through the post-test, English language teachers' speaking proficiency was measured in grammatical resources, lexical resources, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication (see Table 1). On the other hand, the cognitive and emotional stability rubric was based on categories such as resilience, emotional stability, cognitive stability, and perceived stress (see Table 2).

Participants of the study

The sample of the study consisted of 64 EFL teachers who taught English at the university level in Saudi Arabia. Their age ranged between 35 and 50 years. They were divided equally into experimental (n = 32) and control (n = 32) groups. The teachers were involved in EMI teaching practices during the time of the study.

Data collection tools

Several instruments were employed at pretest and posttest. The English speaking skill was measured by a rating scale which was adapted from the Cambridge English Advanced (CAE) Speaking Assessment Scale (Cambridge English, n.d.), and was adjusted to measure the speaking ability of English language instructors. The scale consisted of five subscales, namely grammatical resource, lexical resource, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication (see Table 1). The same rating scale was used at both the pretest and the posttest to maintain the comparability of the results.

Table 1: Speaking Proficiency levels Assessed through the pre-test and post-test

Speaking Skill	Measured Sub-Skills	Outstanding	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Grammatical Resource	Control of grammatical forms	Uses a wide range of structures accurately with rare errors.	Uses a reasonable range with some errors that do not affect meaning.	Limited range with frequent errors affecting clarity.
Lexical Resource	Range and appropriacy of vocabulary	Uses varied and precise vocabulary	Uses adequate vocabulary with some	Uses limited or inappropriate

		effectively.	repetition or vocabulary.	
Discourse Management	Fluency, coherence, cohesion	Speaks fluently with clear, well-connected ideas.	Generally coherent with some hesitation.	Speech is hesitant, fragmented, and poorly organized.
Pronunciation	Intelligibility and phonological control	Clear pronunciation with effective stress and intonation.	Mostly intelligible with minor pronunciation issues.	Frequent pronunciation problems reduce intelligibility.
Interactive Communication	Turn-taking and negotiation	Interacts confidently and develops the discussion.	Participates but with limited initiative.	Has difficulty responding or sustaining interaction.

Note. This rubric was adapted from the Cambridge English Advanced (CAE) Speaking Assessment framework and simplified for use with English language teachers. It was applied consistently in both the pre-test and post-test to ensure comparability of speaking proficiency outcomes across groups.

Perceived Resilience Cognitive and emotional resilience was measured using the rubric adapted from PSS (Cohen et al., 2004), RS (Wagnild & Young, 1993), and RP (Chandelkar & Shetty, 2019), in which resilience, emotional stability, cognitive stability, and perceived stress were gauged (see Table 2). Self-evaluation form. To obtain more information on the difficulties, stress, and motivation experienced by teachers in EMI classes, a self-evaluation form was also employed.

Table 2 Cognitive and Emotional Stability Rubric for Pre-Test and Post-Test

Category of Assessment	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Resilience	Manages challenges with moderate difficulty and limited coping strategies.	Demonstrates improved coping, persistence, and adaptability to challenges.	Shows moderate coping with frequent difficulty under pressure.	Limited improvement in coping and persistence.
Emotional Stability	Experiences fluctuating emotions and occasional emotional strain.	Maintains emotional balance and responds calmly to classroom	Shows emotional fluctuation and stress in demanding situations.	Continues to show emotional strain with minimal regulation.

			demands.				
Cognitive Stability	Shows inconsistent focus and difficulty managing cognitive load.	Demonstrates improved focus, clarity, and task management.	Experiences cognitive overload and reduced concentration.	Limited cognitive control and persistent overload.			
Perceived Stress	Reports high stress during instructional and interactional tasks.	Reports reduced stress and improved stress management.	Reports high stress with limited coping mechanisms.	Stress levels remain high with little change.			

Pre- and post-tests were of 40 questions and were given under the same conditions. The time allowed for the test was about one hour, as was the case in the institution course.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics summarized pretest and posttest performance for both groups. Independent-samples t-tests checked if differences between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant. Before this analysis, data were checked to make sure they met the normality assumption. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all analyses.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

The descriptive statistics for English language teachers' speaking proficiency and cognitive and emotional resilience across pre-test and post-test administrations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Pre-Test, Post-Test, and Independent-Samples t-Test Results for Speaking Proficiency and Cognitive and Emotional Resilience

Category	Group	Pre-Test Score (%)	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Score (%)	Post-Test Mean	t-value	p-value
Speaking Proficiency	Experimental	57	65.50	80	86.21	8.98	< 0.002
	Control	57	65.50	59	69.11		
Cognitive and Emotional Resilience	Experimental	66	72.11	84	82.32	7.99	< 0.002

Control	66	72.11	68	61.69
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As shown in Table 3, the experimental group recorded a pre-test mean score of 65.50 in speaking proficiency, which increased substantially to 86.21 in the post-test (SD = 5.65). In contrast, the control group showed only a modest increase from a pre-test mean of 65.20 to a post-test mean of 69.11 (SD = 6.78).

In the same vein, the results for the descriptive statistics for cognitive and emotional resilience are such that for the experimental group, the mean of the pre-test is 72.11 and the mean of the post-test is 82.32 (SD = 5.25) and for the control group, the mean of the pre-test is 72.11 and the mean of the post-test is 61.69 (SD = 6.88). The results indicate that the post-test scores for the experimental group are higher than those for the control group. The mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test for the speaking proficiency test are depicted in Figure 3 and the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test for the cognitive and emotional resilience test are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 3: Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Speaking Proficiency Scores by Group

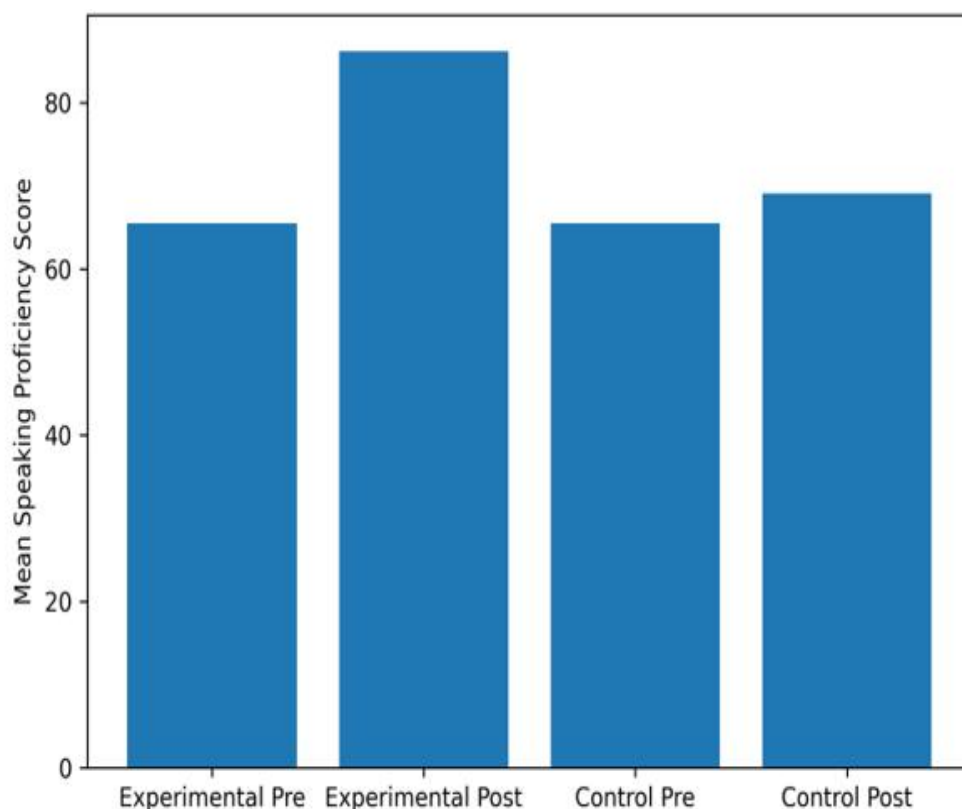


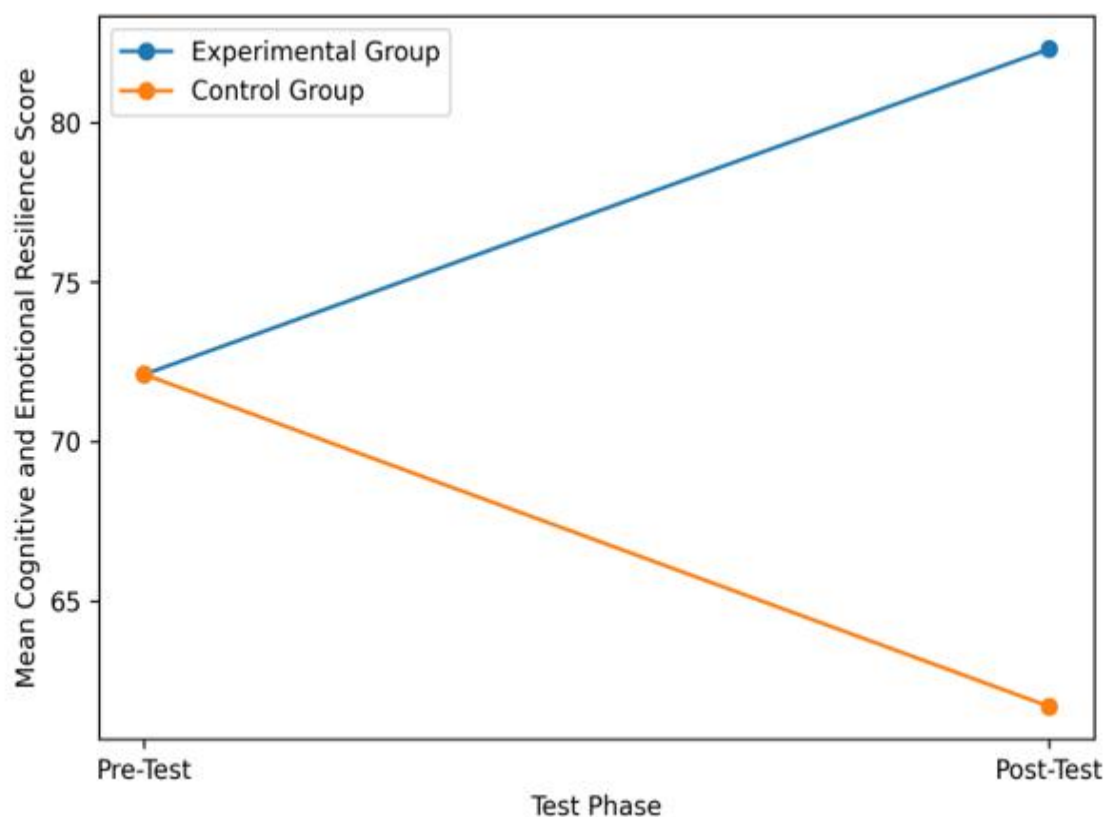
Figure 3 displays the mean pre-test and post-test speaking ability scores of the EFL teachers in experimental and control groups. As it is indicated, the experimental group outperforms the control group in post-test scores. That is, it is the experimental group that has a marked progress in the speaking ability compared with control group which witnesses little progress.

Inferential Results

To determine whether the differences between experimental and control groups were significant, an independent-samples t-test was employed. The results of the inferential statistics are displayed in Table 3. As can be seen, a statistically significant difference was observed between the post-test speaking achievement of experimental ($M = 86.21$) and control ($M = 69.11$) groups, $t = 8.98$, $p < 0.002$. It means that the S-DT based intervention had a positive effect on the EFL teachers' speaking ability compared to the control group.

The t test result on the mean values of resilience cognition and emotion for the experimental group ($M 82.32$) and the control group ($M 61.69$), $t 7.99$, $p 0.002$, is displayed in Table 3. In addition, Figure 4 presents the graphical display of the post-test results of the resilience of the two groups after the treatment.

Figure 4 Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Cognitive and Emotional Resilience Scores by Group



Supplementary Findings from Self-Evaluation

More specific qualitative descriptions in the self-reporting questionnaires support the quantitative data above. Most English language instructors admitted that they struggled with explaining high-level knowledge in English, and most of them taught EMI courses. They felt that students' insufficient English proficiency caused learners' emotional disturbance and decreased participation in class discussion. Not only students' communicative abilities but also teachers' English teaching confidence suffered. They suggested improving students' fundamental English teaching and

providing EMI teaching preparation particularly in the school and foundation-year settings.

DISCUSSION

This study fills in the current research gap in the EMI literature by investigating the cognitive and emotional obstacles encountered by ELT instructors in the Gulf. Furthermore, it seeks to explore effective strategies that can enhance the resilience of ELT instructors operating within demanding organizational contexts (Zumor, 2019; Hillman et al., 2023). Specifically, from the perspective of self-determination, this study answers the research need in the EMI literature to provide empirical research to explore the relationship between autonomy-supportive socio-academic practices and ELT instructors' speaking proficiency and cognitive and emotional resilience in the Saudi Arabian EMI context.

In terms of the descriptive and inferential statistics, it is evident that the experimental teachers outperformed the control teachers in terms of post-test speaking scores and both psychological and cognitive and emotional resilience. Instead of just measuring an improvement in performance, the results could be explained by an improvement in psychological processes in an autonomy-supportive context that fosters autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Following the predictions of SDT, the provision of a higher degree of professional autonomy, better-structured and timely feedback, and a greater sense of community and cooperation could have helped the experimental teachers to better cope with stress and maintain their levels of motivation when facing the challenges of EMI.

The results corroborate previous studies highlighting the role of institutional and social support in enhancing teacher resilience (Bryan & von Suchodoletz, 2023) and expand upon them by showing that theoretically grounded intervention strategies may contribute to positive professional consequences. The enhancement of the speaking skills of experimental teachers can also be interpreted as a by-product of alleviated emotional distress and enhanced motivational control, which is consistent with the argument that emotional well-being and cognitive function are intimately connected with language use in EMI. The quick move to online teaching and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic created extra instructional and cognitive challenges for Saudi EFL teachers and learners (Ahmed et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of supportive professional environments in EMI settings.

In addition, these self-evaluation data offer some qualitative explanations for the quantitative results. As teachers themselves described the obstacles to clarify abstract language, maintain students' language proficiency level, and keep up their interactional confidence, they were also acknowledged in other EMI studies (Elyas & Al-Hoorie, 2024). The consistency between teachers' perceptions and quantitative results implies that socio-academic and autonomy-supporting approaches can be effective in alleviating the EMI-related challenges by promoting reflection on the self, rather than the improvement of teaching skills. At the institutional level, the results of the current study substantiate the previously proposed claim that besides

policy planning, good governance needs to be sought in order to provide opportunities for professional development and teacher satisfaction (Ahmed, 2008). Besides, the results of the current study are consistent with other EFL pedagogical efforts undertaken in the Saudi context which have given importance to agency and reflexivity (Rehman & Ahmed, 2023).

Finally, it should be noted that, given the quasi-experimental nature of the study, the results should be understood within the limitations of this design. Although statistically significant differences between the two groups were found, these results show correlation rather than causation. However, the study provides some empirical support for the idea that a form of intervention rooted in self-determination theory can be used as an effective tool for enhancing the resilience of English language instructors in the face of EMI-induced stress.

Pathways for Future Research

Suggestions for future research: Firstly, a longitudinal study is required to see whether the positive effects of the intervention on language teachers' emotional resilience, psychological resilience, and speaking skills will remain stable over a long period of time and across different semesters. Secondly, the same intervention study can be conducted in other Gulf and non-Gulf EMI universities in order to test the generalisability and specificity of the findings. Thirdly, an interesting research agenda for the future is to investigate the impact of an autonomy-supportive intervention on other language skills, such as writing, reading, listening, vocabulary, and educational micro-teaching. Lastly, it might be interesting to investigate how students benefit from an autonomy-supportive learning environment on their emotional resilience, motivation, and learning outcomes within EMI classes.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the utility of autonomy-supportive interventions in enhancing the cognitive and emotional resilience of English language teachers in EMI contexts. Since EMI contexts are cognitively, emotionally, and motivationally more demanding, teacher stress and motivation maintenance are also of particular concern. Statistically significant differences were found in post-test speaking proficiency and cognitive and emotional resilience between the socio-academic intervention group and non-intervention group, implying that autonomy-supportive professional contexts are linked with desirable professional consequences.

This study, however, shows that there is a need for educational policies and practices that address the psychological and professional well-being of EMI teachers. The S-d framework could be a suitable choice as it gives emphasis to the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Implementing such a framework may equip EMI teachers with the emotional and professional tools required to deal with the emotional challenges of teaching in EMI and maintain their motivation and confidence. However, when interpreting these results, some considerations need to be taken into account. Firstly, the data for this study were collected using quantitative means only, which may not provide a clear insight into

the lived experiences of EMI teachers in foreign language instruction. Secondly, the study focused on a small sample of EMI teachers in one university in Saudi Arabia, which may not be representative of other EMI teachers elsewhere.

However, as long as the above-mentioned issues are borne in mind, the study still provides an empirical source for the emerging literature of EMI with regard to the effects of a theoretically-based intervention programme on English language teachers' resilience and pedagogical effectiveness. The results of the present study highlight the importance of further empirical, contextualised research with regard to the psycholinguistic aspects of ELT in EMI contexts.

Recommendations

Finally, based on the results of the present study, some implications are provided. Saudi EMI educational settings and similar contexts can include self-determination theory (SDT) based practices in in-service teacher training programs to enhance teachers' psychology. Policymakers, departmental managers, and academic course leaders should conduct in-depth needs analyses in order to understand what cognitive, emotional, and motivational difficulties their English language instructors face in EMI environments.

Second, it is necessary to transform traditional task-oriented working conditions into socio-academic professional working conditions. Organizing time and space to share experiences and problems, and participating in collective discussions might foster professional communities and emotional regulation. Offering workshops and in-service training about autonomy-supportive teaching and managing stress and reflection could improve teachers' resilience and motivation.

Last but not least, it is recommended that the institutions develop some form of monitoring and self-assessment tool for the teachers to gauge their professional and emotional trajectory. This might promote more sustainable teaching practices and, in turn, better teaching outcomes in EMI.

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