



Factors promoting EFL students' emotional engagement: Voices from teachers and students in a rural area

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Abstract The study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' emotional engagement at high schools in rural areas has obtained little attention in the current literature. Addressing this gaps, the present study investigated both teachers' and students' voices on the factors promoting emotional engagement and the strategies used by teachers to foster it in a senior high school in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. A qualitative case study design was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with four English teachers and twenty students. The data were analyzed using six phased thematic analysis approach. The findings reveal that students' emotional engagement is shaped by a dynamic interplay of teacher-related, student-related, and contextual factors. From teachers' perspectives, key influencing factors include teachers' emotional competence, teacher–student rapport, and the availability of school facilities. Meanwhile, students perceived their personal motivation, peer and parental support as the factors fostering their emotional involvement in learning. Furthermore, teachers were found to implement a range of interactive and motivational learning strategies, such as incorporating games, song and visual materials, to promote the students' emotional engagement. These strategies function as adaptive responses to contextual challenges, particularly in resource-limited rural setting, where inadequate facilities and learning materials necessitate greater reliance on teacher creativity and relational support. The study contributes to the understanding of emotional engagement particularly in rural EFL classrooms where pedagogical, relational, and structural factors interact to shape students' emotional experience. The findings offer implications for EFL teachers, students, school leaders and policymakers to establish emotionally supportive and contextually responsive learning environments.

Keywords: affective participation, English language, foreign language learning, non-urban educational setting

1. Introduction

In recent years, students' emotional engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class has increasingly attracted attention in EFL research, as it is essential in English language teaching. Emotional engagement is associated with motivated involvement during learning activities, leading to increased participation and interest in educational settings (Liu et al., 2022; Nurisma et al., 2024). It is reflected in students' affective responses when participating in activities or tasks involving the target language (Hiver et al., 2021), and can be demonstrated through positive emotions such as curiosity, interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm, which foster a deep connection with the subject matter (Ma & Hui, 2023). Emotionally engaged students actively and enthusiastically participate in learning activities and feel positive about their involvement in the learning process (Reeve et al., 2019). On the other hand, students who are not emotionally engaged often show low participation, a lack of interest in learning English, and are at risk of poor academic performance (Liu et al., 2024; Wang & Ye, 2021).

Disengagement also affects teachers, who may find it challenging to motivate and connect with disengaged students, leading to increased stress, burnout, and diminished professional satisfaction. The additional effort required to engage these students can divert attention from other teaching responsibilities. Preliminary studies have shown that teachers with more disengaged students in their classrooms report feeling overwhelmed and less effective in their roles (Adigun et al., 2023; Febriana & Suparman, 2020). These studies also indicate that disengaged students can disrupt the classroom environment and reduce the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes.

Several studies have identified factors influencing emotional engagement, including intrapersonal, social, and task-related aspects (Sulis, 2022). Intrapersonal factors allude to positive emotions such as satisfaction and accomplishment; social factors refer to classroom dynamics shaped by peers and teachers; and task-related factors concern the benefits and appeals



of given tasks. In addition, teachers' emotional intelligence and the quality of teacher-student relationships play a significant role in promoting students' emotional engagement by creating a positive classroom environment that enhances both emotional and academic engagement (Abiodullah et al., 2020; Wang, 2023; Welmilla, 2020). Students are also more engaged when tasks are meaningful and relevant (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). These studies underscore the critical role of teachers in fostering students' emotional engagement.

However, research on students' emotional engagement in the Indonesian EFL context remains limited. Most previous studies have primarily focused on the emotional engagement of students in urban educational settings (Imamyartha et al., 2023; Yulia et al., 2020; Zainuddin et al., 2020), with limited attention given to schools in rural areas, where learning conditions may differ. This represents a notable gap, as rural schools often face challenges such as limited educational resources, inadequate infrastructure, low socio-economic conditions, and shortages of qualified teachers (Huilla, 2020). Similar challenges in rural area have been reported globally (e.g., Africa and South Asia), such as limited access to professional development, difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers, and insufficient teaching strategies and learning materials (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2022; Chakanika et al., 2012; Muniroh et al., 2023). These conditions may shape distinct factors influencing emotional engagement, making it essential to investigate this context to develop context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that effectively support students' engagement.

Despite these contextual differences, empirical studies examining EFL students' emotional engagement in rural school contexts remain scarce. In addition, few studies have simultaneously examined both teachers' and students' perspectives in these contexts. Understanding both perspectives is important, as emotional engagement is shaped by classroom interaction and shared experiences.

The results of our informal interview with the English teachers at a senior high school in a rural area in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia indicate that while some students are emotionally engaged, but many are not. This condition poses challenges for the teachers as emotionally disengaged students tend to experience negative or conflicting emotions during learning (Reeve et al., 2019), which may also affect their cognitive engagement and academic performance (Wang et al., 2011; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by examining factors that promote emotional engagement in a rural Indonesian school context, focusing on both teachers' and students' perspectives, and exploring the strategies teachers use to foster engagement.

Hence, this case study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors do teachers identify as promoting their students' emotional engagement in EFL classes?
2. What factors do students identify as promoting their emotional engagement in EFL classes?
3. What strategies do teachers use to promote students' emotional engagement in EFL classes?

Recognizing the factors that affect the emotional engagement of EFL students in a rural area and the strategies teachers use to support can help EFL teachers and students gain a deeper understanding of the importance of emotional engagement. It will also assist EFL teachers in considering these factors as they plan their English lessons. Furthermore, understanding these factors allows teachers to innovate and adapt strategies that foster emotional engagement and mitigate the impact of barriers such as limited resources, inadequate facilities, and socio-economic disadvantages. Such efforts are essential for creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students can thrive emotionally and academically.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

In this research, we employed a qualitative case study to investigate the phenomenon in its natural context. A qualitative case study provides a framework for analyzing the entity and context in which social activity occurs (Priya, 2021). In this context, a case study was suited for this research because it allowed us to explore the specific case of English teachers and students in a senior high school in a rural area in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. It also enabled us to capture the nuanced perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the factors influencing EFL students' emotional engagement and the strategies teachers employ to promote it.

2.2. Research Participants

The participants in this study consisted of four English teachers, referred to by the pseudonyms Susi, Sarah, Mawar, and Melati, and 20 students, identified as T1 to T20, from a senior high school in a rural area in East Nusa Tenggara. Since purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who can provide the most relevant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), we used this technique to select participants with specific characteristics relevant to our research on factors promoting EFL students' emotional engagement. The teachers were selected based on their extensive experience, with each having at least five years of teaching EFL in under-resourced schools. This criterion ensured that they could provide in-depth insights into the challenges and strategies associated with fostering emotional engagement in such contexts.

Furthermore, the twenty students were selected to represent diverse proficiency levels and backgrounds. All students had been learning in the same instructional context for at least one academic year, ensuring they had substantial experience

with the unique challenges of learning EFL in this setting. Additionally, all selected students were enrolled in the participating teachers' classes, which maintained consistency in the instructional context.

The sample size was considered appropriate for this qualitative case study, as it allowed for in-depth exploration while ensuring data saturation. Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from student interviews after the 18th participant, and subsequent data only confirmed existing patterns. It is in line with qualitative research logic where sample adequacy is determined by information richness rather than numerical size.

2.3. Data Collection

The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which lasted 20 – 30 minutes for each participant. The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature on emotional engagement. It consisted of open-ended questions organized into two main areas: (1) how students' and teachers perceive factors influencing emotional engagement, and (2) teachers' strategies to foster emotional engagement in the classroom. Prior to the main data collection, the interview protocol was reviewed by an expert in EFL pedagogy to ensure content validity and clarity.

Furthermore, we asked the students about their personal information and how they perceived factors promoting their emotional engagement when learning English in the classroom. Meanwhile, the teachers were asked about their personal information, how they perceived factors promoting students' emotional engagement and the strategies they used to promote students' emotional engagement in the classroom. We conducted the interviews online via Zoom, and they were recorded for transcription purposes. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure the participants understood the questions well and gave accurate responses.

2.4. Data Analysis

To detect, examine, and summarize the themes found in the interview data, we applied thematic analysis using a six-phase model (Braun & Clarke, 2022) including familiarization of data, generation of codes, combining codes into themes, reviewing themes, determining significance of themes, and reporting of findings. For the first phase of familiarization, the researchers transcribed the recordings of individual interviews. Then, the transcribed data were read and reread. Next, we created the first codes pertinent to the research questions and collected the codes and the related data extracts. The codes did not exist beforehand; they sprang into being throughout the analysis.

Subsequently, in the theme development step, we compiled the collected codes into themes and sub-themes. The themes were then examined and improved to make sure they were compatible with the data and the research questions. The last was finalizing for reporting purposes. In case of inconsistent coding, consensus among researchers was used to determine the final codes. This data analysis process was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being predetermined.

2.5. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability. For the study's credibility, we used member checking, since it involves providing participants with the interview transcripts for checking of data accuracy (Stake, 1995). Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted among the researchers to discuss emerging codes and themes. To enhance dependability, a clear audit trail was maintained, documenting the data collection and analysis procedures. Furthermore, confirmability was addressed through reflexive practices, including maintaining reflective journals to minimize researcher bias and ensure that the findings were grounded in participants' perspectives.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the study. It describes the perceptions of teachers and students regarding factors influencing students' emotional engagement and the strategies used to promote it.

3.1. Teachers' perception of factors promoting students' emotional engagement

According to the teachers, three factors affect students' emotional engagement in EFL classes. Those factors are teachers' emotional competence, teachers-students rapport, and school facilities. Below are the details of each factor:

3.1.1. Teachers' emotional competence

Teachers emphasized the importance of managing their emotions and responding to students' needs. They explained that patience, kindness, and flexibility help maintain students' interest and involvement in learning.

Teachers who show anger in the learning process make their students unhappy and uninterested in learning English at class.... We must be more patient because we face students from different backgrounds with different English competencies. (Susi).

If I find students unenthusiastic in the learning process, I will approach them and ask for their problems. Teachers should show feelings of kindness and friendship. If we approach them with warmth and smiles, students will welcome us with open hearts and find the learning process highly interesting. ...teachers need to appreciate students when they finish doing their tasks or answering questions given by teachers. (Mawar).

"Many students feel unenthusiastic about learning English when I use a monotonous teaching strategy. I usually vary the teaching strategies to make my students interested in learning English.... I usually play games to arouse my students' interest in learning English in class. (Melati).

When my students feel bored, we usually sing English songs together to make the class fun and students happy.... My students feel happy when I speak English in the classroom because they can learn from what they listen to or ask them to do group work. (Sarah).

These responses show that teachers are attentive to students' emotional conditions, such as boredom and low enthusiasm during learning. They respond by adjusting both their interpersonal behaviour, for example by showing patience and warmth, and their instructional practices, such as varying strategies and using interactive activities.

3.1.2. Teachers-students' rapport

Teachers-student rapport is another factor identified in the data as influencing students' emotional engagement in EFL classes. The following excerpts illustrate this:

We have to be friendly with our students to build rapport among us so that they feel comfortable and happy to learn English in the classroom. (Susi).

When talking to my students outside the classroom, I usually talk as if I am talking to my best friend so that my students and I can have a positive relationship. (Sarah).

These responses show that teachers intentionally reduce distance with students by creating informal and supportive interactions. Such relationships help students feel safe and accepted in the classroom. This sense of comfort appears to support students' willingness to participate in learning activities.

3.1.3. School Facilities

The teachers reported that the lack of facilities affected students' emotional engagement in EFL classes. Insufficient resources made it difficult for students to focus on their academic task and hindered their ability to feel comfortable and enjoy the learning process. The teachers' statement below best explains the issue.

A comfortable classroom makes students feel happy while learning English. In the beginning, I always ensure the classroom atmosphere is conducive for students to learn, for example, the desk arrangement according to our learning activities.... Due to the lack of classrooms in our school, when we have class, we usually borrow some rooms from an elementary school in the same areas as ours.... Some students are less enthusiastic about doing their tasks in the classroom because they do not have a hard dictionary or mobile phone for online dictionaries.... they feel too shy to ask teachers when they do not know the meanings of words. (Susi)

We do not prepare dictionaries at schools, so students are asked to bring them. Some students who do not have a dictionary show feelings of unhappiness when they are doing their tasks. (Melati)

These responses show that classroom conditions and access to learning resources influence students' emotional experiences. Limited facilities, such as shared classrooms and lack of dictionaries, are linked to reduced confidence and lower enthusiasm. Students may also hesitate to participate when they feel unprepared or lack necessary resources.

3.2. Students' perceptions about factors promoting their emotional engagement

The study results show that three factors contribute to EFL students' emotional engagement at a senior high school in a rural area based on the student's perceptions. They are students' personal factors, peers' support and parents' support.

3.2.1. Personal factors

In this study, the student's personal factors contribute to their emotional engagement in the classroom. The students perceived that their achievement and motivation also affected their emotional engagement in the EFL classroom. Some students express the following comments:

I am happy to learn English in the classroom because I always get the highest score. (S9).

I like learning English and always enjoy it when the teacher teaches us. (S11).

English is useful for pursuing higher education and the success of my future career. (S5).

These responses show that students who achieve well or enjoy learning English tend to feel more positive in class. A clear awareness of the usefulness of English also supports their motivation. Together, these factors are associated with greater participation and engagement in learning.

3.2.2. Peer support

Peers supports also plays a significant role in shaping students' emotional engagement in EFL classes. The presence and interactions with classmates can greatly influence how students feel about their learning experience. Positive peer relationships often enhance students' motivation and confidence, whereas negative interactions can reduce their enthusiasm and willingness to participate. The following excerpts from participants illustrate these points.

I am happy because I do not learn alone in the classroom. I learn with my friends, who usually help me when I do not understand teachers' explanations. (S1).

I am not happy to learn English because my friends laugh at me when I make mistakes in reading or speaking. (S13).

These responses show that peer interactions can support or hinder students' emotional engagement. Helpful classmates increase confidence and make learning more enjoyable. In contrast, negative behaviours such as teasing may discourage students from participating.

3.2.3. Parents' support

The final factor affecting students' emotional engagement is the level of support they receive from their parents. Parental involvement and encouragement are critical in shaping students' attitudes toward learning, as those who perceive active parental engagement tend to exhibit greater enthusiasm and positive learning dispositions. The following statements from students reflect the significant impact of parental support on their learning experiences:

I am happy and enjoy learning English because my parents keep motivating me to learn. (S7).

My parents support me in learning English. They are happy when I try to practice speaking English at home, even if it is not perfect. (S2).

These responses show that encouragement from parents is linked to positive emotions in learning. Students who receive support tend to feel more motivated and confident. This support also appears to encourage them to continue practicing English.

3.3. Strategies teachers use to promote students' emotional engagement

The findings demonstrate that the teachers applied two types of strategies to promote students' emotional engagement: instructional and affective strategies.

3.3.1. Interactive Learning Strategies

Interactive learning strategies are closely related to teaching techniques which teachers employ to foster students' emotional engagement in the classroom. In line with this, the teachers in this study reported using various interactive approaches to promote students' emotional engagement, as reflected in the following excerpts:

I often use games when students and I discuss grammar in texts we read, and they are very happy and enthusiastic about learning. (Melati).

I use a game called 'concentration' to avoid students' feelings of boredom when learning in the classroom. (Sarah).

I sometimes use songs when we learn vocabulary. (Susi).

I use pictures when learning some text types, such as descriptive text. (Mawar).

These responses show that interactive activities are used to make lessons more enjoyable and reduce boredom. Such activities help create a more active classroom atmosphere. They also appear to encourage students to participate more during learning.

3.3.2. Motivational Strategies

Another effective strategy employed by the teachers to promote students' emotional engagement is through motivational strategies. These strategies aims to inspire and encourage students, enabling them to engage more deeply with their learning. The teachers integrate motivational elements into their lessons to foster a positive and supportive learning environment. The following comments illustrate their approach.

At home, I usually watch some inspiring videos from YouTube and tell my students at the beginning of our meeting to give them values of learning English.....or tell the story in the middle of our lessons. (Melati).

At the beginning and end of the lesson, I give motivational talks and emotional support. (Mawar).

These responses show that teachers use encouragement and inspiring content to influence students' attitudes toward learning. Such strategies help students feel more interested in English. They also appear to support students' emotional engagement to the learning process.

4. Discussions

This study examined students' emotional engagement in a rural EFL context and shows that engagement is shaped by the interaction of teacher-related, student-related, and contextual factors. Rather than operating independently, these factors work together to influence how students feel about learning and how they participate in classroom activities. In this sense, emotional engagement emerges as a situated process that develops through ongoing classroom interactions.

A central finding is the role of teachers' emotional competence. Consistent with Reeve et al. (2019), teachers' expressions of patience, warmth, and empathy are associated with students' interest and enjoyment, while negative emotions may lead to disengagement. However, this study extends prior work by showing that in a rural context, emotional competence functions as a compensatory mechanism (Pianta et al., 2012). In settings where instructional resources are limited, teachers' emotional support becomes more critical in sustaining engagement. This suggests that students rely more heavily on affective support when material resources are insufficient. In such conditions, teachers' ability to create a supportive emotional climate may partially offset the absence of adequate learning tools and infrastructure. However, this reliance on teachers' emotional competence also raises concerns about sustainability, as it places a disproportionate burden on teachers to compensate for structural limitations.

The emotional competence in this study is also closely linked to instructional practices. Teachers not only regulate their emotions but also adjusted their teaching strategies in response to students' emotional states. The use of games, songs, and group work reflects an effort to reduce boredom and create a more positive classroom atmosphere. While this supports Lawal (2025) and Pedler et al. (2020), the present findings further suggest that these strategies are effective because they address students' emotional needs. For instance, interactive activities may reduce performance pressure and create a low-risk environment where students feel more comfortable participating. These strategies shift the focus from accuracy to participation, allowing students to engage without fear of making mistakes. This is especially relevant in EFL classrooms, where anxiety often limits students' willingness to communicate. In this sense, instructional practices can be understood as practical expressions of teachers' emotional competence (Heilporn et al., 2021), through which teachers shape students' emotional experiences during learning. This suggests that instructional strategies function less as technical tools and more as affective interventions that reshape students' emotional experience of learning.

Teacher-student rapport also emerged as a key factor. In line with Song et al. (2022) and Zhou (2021), friendly and supportive relationships foster a sense of comfort and belonging. The findings further indicate that rapport strengthens the impact of other teaching practices. When students feel safe and supported, they are more willing to participate, whereas negative interactions may lead to anxiety and disengagement (Sankalaite et al., 2023). This suggests that emotional engagement depends not only on what teachers do, but also on how students perceive their relationship with teachers. Rapport, therefore, functions as a foundation that enables other engagement strategies to be effective.

Contextual factors, particularly school facilities, also play a significant role. Consistent with Siwa and Basthomi (2023) and Coronado (2021), limited resources reduce students' comfort and focus. However, this study adds that such limitations also affect students emotionally, creating feelings of embarrassment and reluctance to participate, especially when students lack basic tools such as dictionaries. This reflects broader conditions in disadvantaged regions, where limited infrastructure and learning resources continue to affect educational processes (2025). It is apparent that emotional engagement is shaped not only by teaching practices but also by material conditions, which are often overlooked in previous research. These findings suggest that material limitations not only affect access to learning but also shape students' emotional experiences, which may influence their long-term attitudes toward language learning. Although teachers attempted to adapt to these constraints, their efforts were not sufficient to fully overcome structural limitations (Murniatin & Hadziq, 2022). This highlights the need for improved learning environments to support both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning. From the students' perspective, personal factors such as motivation, achievement, and perceived value of English influence their engagement. However, the findings also show that motivation is not fixed but can change through classroom experiences. Students who initially lacked interest became more engaged when teachers used interactive strategies, supporting Zheng et al. (2025) that engagement is dynamically constructed through interaction. This indicates that teacher practices can play an important role in shaping students' motivation over time.

Peer relationships show both positive and negative effects. Supportive peers enhance confidence and enjoyment, consistent with Ricard and Pelletier (2016). In contrast, negative behaviours, such as teasing, discourage participation, extending Chu and Chu (2010) by showing that peer influence depends on the quality of interaction rather than being inherently beneficial. This dual role shows that peer environments are inherently unstable, where the same social context can either facilitate or undermine engagement. In particular, negative peer responses may increase students' fear of making mistakes, which is especially critical in language learning contexts where participation is essential. This highlights the importance of creating a classroom environment where mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process.

Parental support also contributes to students' emotional engagement. Students who receive encouragement show more positive attitudes and motivation, in line with Salsabila (2025) and Liu et al. (2022). However, the findings also suggest that parental involvement varies depending on context, with some students experiencing limited support due to socio-cultural expectations about the role of schooling. This indicates that parental influence is not uniform and should be understood within

its social context. In rural settings, where parental awareness of language learning may be limited, school-based support may become more important.

In terms of strategies, teachers relied on both interactive and motivational approaches to promote engagement. Interactive strategies, such as games and songs, create enjoyment and encourage participation (Bokiev et al., 2018; Hellín et al., 2023; Huang & Bakuto, 2024; Phuong & Trang, 2021). Motivational strategies, such as storytelling and encouragement, help shape students' attitudes toward learning (Kusurkar et al., 2011; Yu & Wang, 2025). Notably, these strategies were implemented with limited technological support, highlighting teachers' adaptability. This challenges the assumption that effective engagement depends on advanced technology and suggests that pedagogical creativity plays a more important role in resource-constrained settings. In this context, engagement is sustained not through tools, but through meaningful interactions and adaptive teaching practices.

Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional engagement in EFL classrooms is a context-dependent and multi-layered construct. It is shaped by the interaction between teachers' emotional competence, instructional practices, relationships, student characteristics, and contextual conditions. Importantly, in under-resourced rural settings, engagement relies less on material support and more on teachers' ability to create emotionally supportive and adaptive learning environments. This perspective encourages a shift from resource-centered approaches toward a more relational and adaptive understanding of teaching. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the central role of teachers' emotional and relational practices in sustaining engagement, particularly in contexts where resources are limited.

5. Conclusions

This study explored factors affecting EFL students' emotional engagement and teachers' strategy to promote it in the case of a senior high school in a rural area in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The findings suggest that students' emotional engagement is not influenced by a single factor but emerges from the dynamic interplay of factors including factors perceived by teachers including teachers' emotional competence, teacher-students' rapport, and learning facilities. Among these, teacher-related practices, particularly emotional competence, school facilities, and rapport, emerge as central in sustaining students' engagement, especially under conditions of limited resources. The study emphasizes that emotional engagement in rural settings is not only influenced by pedagogical practices but also constrained by material conditions, such as limited facilities and access to learning resources. While teachers attempt to compensate for these constraints through adaptive and emotionally responsive strategies, their efforts cannot fully replace structural support. This indicates that emotional engagement in under-resourced contexts is both pedagogically constructed and structurally conditioned.

From the students' perspective, emotional engagement factors include students' personal factors (motivation), peers' support and parental support. These factors interact dynamically with classroom experiences, showing that emotional engagement is not only individually driven but also socially and contextually constructed. Both positive and negative peer interactions, as well as varying levels of parental involvement, further influence students' emotional responses to learning in rural area context.

Furthermore, the teachers applied both interactive and motivational strategies to sustain students' emotional engagement. Interactive activities such as games, songs, and pictures help create enjoyable and participatory learning experiences, while motivational strategies, including storytelling and emotional support, foster students' interest and personal connection to learning. Importantly, these strategies appear to function as adaptive responses to contextual constraints, emphasizing the role of pedagogical creativity in resource-limited settings.

Hence, several implications can be drawn for parents, school leaders, and policymakers within similar educational context. Parents are encouraged to provide consistent emotional support to their children by praising their accomplishments and assisting them when they encounter learning challenges. Next, school leaders should provide more professional development activities for EFL teachers to help them design and implement lessons professionally. Meanwhile, policymakers need to address disparities in educational resources, particularly in rural schools, to better support both teachers and students in comparable context.

However, this current study has several limitations. First, it is based on a relatively small sample which potentially limit the transferability of the findings. Future research could benefit from employing larger and more diverse datasets to produce more generalizable results. Second, as this study was conducted in a single senior high school in a rural in East Nusa Tenggara-Indonesia, the data geographically limited. Further studies coping with more educational settings in rural areas in or out of Indonesia are highly recommended, to provide a more comparative understanding of emotional engagement in EFL learning.

6. Declarations

6.1. Ethical considerations

All research procedures involving human participants were carried out in accordance with ethical standards at the institutional, national, and international levels, including those recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) and the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS, 2016). Prior to data collection, ethical approval was

obtained. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the participating schools, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Throughout the study, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly maintained.

6.2. Use of Artificial Intelligence

AI tools were used exclusively for language editing, grammatical improvement, and interview transcription assistance. Specifically, ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Otter.ai were used to improve readability and assist with transcription of interview recordings. These tools did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, interpretation of results, or conclusions of the study. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors

6.3. Declaration of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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