

Teacher confirmation and caring in Chinese and Iranian students' willingness to attend EFL classes

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Received: 2/02/2022 / Accepted: 28/12/2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi39.23625>

ISSN paper edition: 1697-7467, ISSN digital edition: 2695-8244

ABSTRACT: This mixed-methods cross-cultural study examined the role of instructor confirmation and care in EFL students' willingness to attend classes (WTAC). For the quantitative phase, 1006 and 605 EFL university students were chosen respectively from Chinese and Iranian universities, and for the qualitative phase, sub-groups of 43 Chinese and 34 Iranian participants were selected. Three close-ended scales and semi-structured interviews were used. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis approved the factor structure and validity of the three scales. Results of correlation and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analyses indicated the positive associative/predictive role of perceived teacher caring and confirmation in Chinese and Iranian students' WTAC. Independent samples t-tests results showed significant differences in perceptions of caring, confirmation, and WTAC, with Chinese participants significantly outperforming Iranians. Frequency counts of qualitative data revealed that both Chinese and Iranian students believed in the facilitative role of confirmation and caring in WTAC. Further content analysis of data through MAXQDA presented four themes of teacher-, student-, context, and task-related factors, among which the teacher-related factors theme and its teacher interpersonal factors sub-theme were deemed very influential by Chinese and Iranian students in predicting WTAC. Teachers can use these findings to improve their interpersonal behaviors and students' class attendance.

Keywords: EFL students, cross-cultural investigation, willingness to attend classes, teacher care, teacher confirmation.

Aprecio y cuidado del profesor en deseos comunicativos en clase de alumnos chinos e iraníes

RESUMEN: El presente estudio mediante métodos mixtos investigó el papel del aprecio y cuidado del profesor en la voluntad comunicativa de los alumnos en clases de inglés como lengua extranjera. Para la fase cuantitativa, se eligieron 1006 y 605 alumnos universitarios chinos e iraníes respectivamente para el muestreo, y para la cualitativa, 43 chinos y 34 iraníes. Se utilizaron tres escalas y entrevistas semiestructuradas para recopilar datos. Los resultados aprobaron la estructura factorial y la validez de las tres escalas e indicaron el papel asociativo y predictivo positivo del aprecio y cuidado del profesor en el WTAC de los alumnos chinos e iraníes. Mientras tanto, mostraron diferencias significativas en las percepciones de cuidado, aprecio y WTAC, en que los participantes chinos superaron notablemente a los iraníes. El análisis también reveló que tanto los alumnos chinos como los iraníes creían en

el papel facilitador del aprecio y del cuidado en WTAC. El análisis de los datos mediante MAXQDA presentó cuatro temas de factores relacionados con el profesor, el alumno, el contexto y la tarea, entre los cuales el tema del profesor y su subtema de factores interpersonales fueron considerados muy influyentes por los alumnos chinos e iraníes en la predicción de WTAC. Los profesores pueden utilizar el resultado del presente estudio para mejorar su comunicaciones interpersonales y el deseo comunicativo de los alumnos en clase.

Palabras clave: alumnos de inglés como lengua extranjera, investigación transcultural, voluntad para asistir a clases, cuidado del profesor, aprecio del profesor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' willingness to attend English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes is a prerequisite for engagement, learning, and motivation since in contrast to individuals' opportunity for receiving input and interaction in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, learners' opportunity for exposure to English is mainly confined to the classroom in EFL context (Derakhshan, 2022a; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). When students pursue classes, they find more chances of engaging with the materials, target language, and instructor, and thus, their learning is promoted. Due to the important role of teachers in the instructional context, the quality of their interpersonal relationships with students can be a determining factor in students' class presence. As Xie and Derakhshan (2021) posited, teachers' interpersonal behaviors can affect a wide range of students' outcomes like class attendance, motivation, engagement, or achievement. Rhetorical/relational goal theory argues that teachers can employ different communication behaviors to satisfy students' relational needs, in turn, assisting them to attain better academic outcomes like learning, motivation, and willingness to attend classes (WTAC) (Mottet et al., 2006). Accordingly, in this study, it is hypothesized that teachers' using care and confirmation as two examples of interpersonal behaviors help satisfy students' relational goals and in turn increase students' academic outcomes of WTAC.

More particularly, teacher care is an interpersonal behavior that is necessary for effective teacher-student relationships (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Teacher care refers to instructors' verbal and non-verbal attempts to meet students' affective and psychological needs (Noddings, 2012). Research has evidenced that when students perceive instructors as caring, they experience higher levels of security, self-esteem, engagement, motivation, and well-being (Derakhshan, 2022a; Derakhshan, Doliński, et al., 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2019). By drawing on these findings and rhetorical/relational goal theory, in the present study, it is hypothesized that teacher caring can positively influence EFL students' WTAC.

Similarly, based on rhetorical/relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006), confirmation is another type of teacher communication behavior, enabling teachers to create emotional bonds with students and establish an enjoyable learning atmosphere (Derakhshan, 2022a). Confirmation refers to instructors' communicative endeavors to show students that they are valuable (Ellis, 2000) through such teachers' verbal and non-verbal cues as answering students' questions and indicating concern for students' learning (Burns et al., 2017). Previous studies have found that teacher confirmation positively predicts students' learning, engagement (Hsu, 2012), empowerment (Derakhshan, 2022a), feelings of satisfaction (Goodboy et al., 2009), and willingness to communicate (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). By drawing on these results, in the current research, we hypothesize that teacher confirmation can positively influence EFL students' WTAC.

Despite the existence of theoretical and empirical support for the facilitative role of confirmation and care in students' educational outcomes, there is still a scarcity of research investigating such teachers' positive interpersonal behaviors in the EFL context (Derakhshan, 2022a; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Scantier is even cross-cultural investigations exploring how these teacher communication cues are constructed, understood, or enacted in similar and dissimilar cultures. Thus, to address this gap, the present study, through adopting an explanatory sequential mixed methods research approach, aims to uncover the roles of teacher confirmation and caring in Chinese and Iranian university EFL students' WTAC.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Rhetorical/Relational Goal Theory

Rhetorical/relational goal theory is a primary theory used in instructional communication research to explain the significance of teacher communication behaviors for students' academic outcomes. Accordingly, it is posited that students have different relational and academic goals. To satisfy students' relational goals, teachers use various communication behaviors like immediacy, clarity, humor, care, and confirmation. When students' relational goals are met, they are more likely to attain academic goals like motivation, learning, engagement, or class attendance (Mottet et al., 2006). Based on this reasoning, in this study, it is hypothesized that perceived teacher care and confirmation can increase Chinese and Iranian EFL students' WTAC. The hypothesized model of this study is presented in Figure 1.

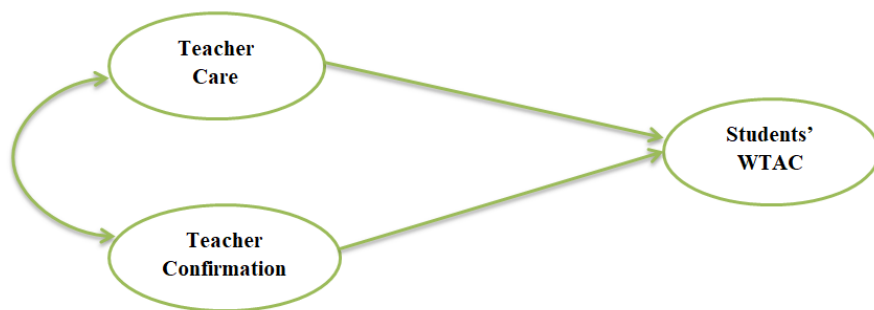


Figure 1. The hypothesized model of teacher care, teacher confirmation, and students' WTAC

2.2. Willingness to attend EFL classes

Class presence/truancy is an important decision that students regularly deal with during their years of education. This decision is so pivotal that it can affect every aspect of the classroom, including teachers' pedagogical practice and success (Pishghadam et al., 2021).

Class presence favorably affects students' academic achievement and performance in exams (Chen & Lin, 2008). Students' WTAC is even more significant in the EFL context where students' exposure to the target language is majorly confined to the classroom. Rajabnejad et al. (2017) designed and validated the WTAC scale to measure Iranian students' perceived WTAC in the EFL context. This scale, which consists of four components of Teacher knowledge, Teacher methodology, Teacher care, Teacher characteristics, and Teacher environment, highlights the role that teachers' personality characteristics, teaching style, and communication behaviors play in students' class attendance tendency.

Following the development of this instrument, EFL researchers initiated measuring WTAC in relation to different teacher- or student-related variables. It was found that Iranian EFL students' WTAC positively influences achievement (Rajabnejad et al., 2017). Moreover, EFL researchers tested and arrived at the positive role of teacher interpersonal factors like stroke (a type of teacher caring behavior) and credibility in Iranian EFL students' WTAC (Derakhshan et al., 2019; Pishghadam et al., 2019; Pishghadam et al., 2021; Rajabnejad et al., 2017). However, rhetorical/relational goal theory encompasses many other communication behaviors, which might be worth investigating, such as teacher clarity, care, immediacy, and confirmation (Derakhshan, 2022a; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Thus, in this study, by drawing on rhetorical/relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006), we explore if teacher care and confirmation, as two less-investigated teacher communication instances, can influence Iranian and Chinese EFL students' WTAC.

2.3. Teacher confirmation

Positive communication behaviors help teachers in creating a positive classroom experience (Derakhshan, 2022b; Wang et al., 2021). According to rhetorical/relational goal theory, one instance of such behaviors is confirmation. As mentioned by Ellis (2000), confirmation is "the transactional process by which teachers talk and interact with students that make them feel they are valuable and significant individuals" (p. 265), characterized by dimensions of (1) using an interactive style of teaching, (2) answering students' comments and questions, (3) showing interest in students' learning, and (4) absence of disconfirmation. It is argued that when teachers decrease their disconfirming behaviors and simultaneously increase the confirming ones, students feel more endorsed and understood. Examples of verbal and non-verbal teacher confirmation cues are responding to students' questions, giving feedback, praising efforts, engaging in constructive communication, and showing concern about students' learning.

To test rhetorical/relational theory's argument for the role of confirmation in students' academic outcomes, results of previous studies indicated that higher levels of confirmation help teachers create a pleasant classroom atmosphere and result in students' increased motivation (Croucher et al., 2021), achievement (Hsu, 2012), engagement (LaBelle & Johnson, 2020), satisfaction (Goodboy et al., 2009), willingness to communicate, and involvement (Sidelinger et al., 2010). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is still no study on how this teacher behavior affects students' WTAC (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Thus, by drawing on rhetorical/relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006), this study endeavors to find empirical evidence for this relationship in two culturally distinct settings of Chinese and Iranian EFL university contexts.

2.4. Teacher care

Teacher care refers to verbal and non-verbal teacher-led cues including eye contact, smiling, nodding, responding respectfully, and paying attention, which facilitates creating teacher-student interpersonal bonds (Derakhshan, 2022a). Based on rhetorical/relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006), teacher caring meets students' psychosocial and emotional needs for teacher attention and respect (Dickinson & Kreitmair, 2019) and pertains to teachers' empathic behavior, openness, and closeness to students (Noddings, 2012), in turn promoting the achievement of desirable academic outcomes by students.

Second/Foreign language (L2) researchers have argued for the indispensable role of care in L2 classes as it enhances instructor-learner relationship quality which is essential for teachers' professional effectiveness (Derakhshan, 2022a; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021) and L2 students' affective growth and psychological well-being (Gabryś-Barker, 2016). In the Iranian EFL context, Pishghadam et al. (2015) conceptualized teacher care with three dimensions: provision of adequate and appropriate feedback; employing verbal and non-verbal behaviors signaling students' presence and value; and maintaining unbiased relationships. Perceived caring has been found to increase academic performance, engagement, satisfaction, respect, learning, well-being, and motivation in students (Derakhshan et al., 2019; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is little research unraveling how care affects EFL students' WTAC (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021), which is one of the main goals of the present study.

2.5. Cross-cultural investigations in L2 education

As noted in the conceptual review paper of Xie and Derakhshan (2021), cross-cultural studies on teacher behaviors in the L2 context have been conducted scarcely. To address this gap, over the past three years, Derakhshan and his co-researchers have initiated a new line of cross-cultural research comparing Iranian EFL teachers' or students' perceptions with their counterparts in British (Greenier et al., 2021), Polish (Derakhshan, Doliński, et al., 2022), Iraqi (Pishghadam et al., 2021), Chinese (Wang, Derakhshan, & Rahimpour, 2022), and multinational (Derakhshan, Greenier, et al., 2022; Wang, Derakhshan, & Azari Noughabi, 2022) cultures regarding the role of such teacher variables as stroke, credibility, care, or rapport in relation to such outcome variables as WTAC, well-being, resilience, or engagement. However, to reach more comprehensive and generalizable findings on a cross-cultural scale, more studies are still needed. One justification for doing cross-cultural studies in Iran and other Asian cultures is McCroskey and McCroskey's (2006) assertion about the majority of such studies having been done exclusively in the United States. They called researchers worldwide to study teacher interpersonal communication behaviors in underrepresented cultural settings. This is because culture can play a pivotal role in constructing and reconstructing teachers' and students' mindset, in turn influencing how they enact, perceive, and experience interpersonal behaviors (Derakhshan et al., 2021). In this respect, Chen et al. (2019) note that "the meaning of closeness might be more likely to differ across collectivistic and individualistic cultures" (p. 101), showing that one's cultural orientation can affect his/her interpersonal bond with others. While as two examples of Asian cultures Chinese and Iranian ones can have some similarities, each has its distinct worldview (Wang, Derakhshan, & Rahimpour,

2022) as presented through Hofstede's (2001) 6-Dimensional model (adopted from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>). A cross-cultural comparison of Chinese and Iranian cultures based on this model is presented in Figure 2.

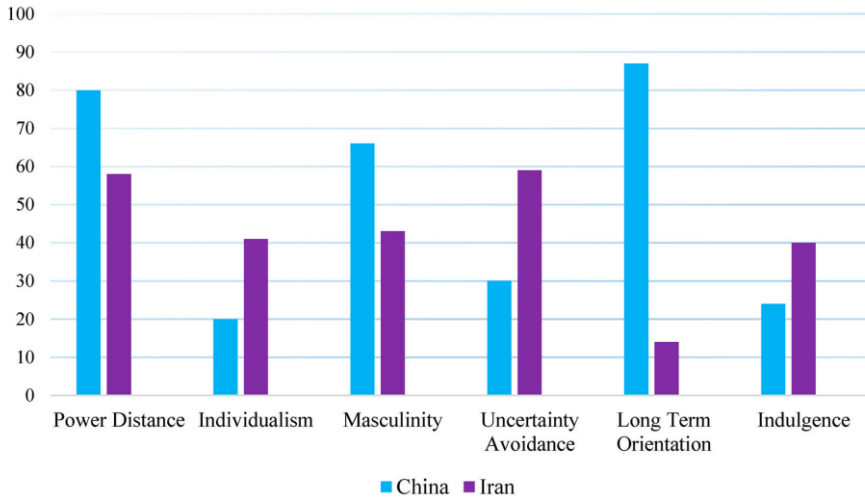


Figure 2. Hofstede's (2001) 6-D model for Chinese (in Blue) and Iranian (in Purple) national cultures

Thus, this study is conducted to see how Chinese and Iranian students converge or diverge regarding their perceptions of teacher care and confirmation in relation to WTAC.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design and Research Questions

Through adopting an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design, the current study explored the role of care and confirmation in Chinese and Iranian EFL students' WTAC. Explanatory sequential design is used when the researcher starts with collecting, analyzing, and reporting quantitative data from a large sample and subsequently engages in collecting, analyzing, and reporting qualitative data from a few cases of the sample (Creswell, 2012). In this design, there is no need to integrate two data forms, but the qualitative data help explain the quantitative results. Accordingly, the first and second research questions of the study are quantitative while the third and fourth research questions are qualitative. As recommended by Creswell (2012), the two forms of data are collected, analyzed, and reported separately in this paper. In the discussion section, the qualitative results are discussed to see to what extent they explain and converge with the discussion of quantitative findings. So,

our study aims to scrutinize whether teacher confirmation and caring can predict students' willingness to attend EFL classes and find out the differences between Chinese and Iranian EFL students regarding their perceptions of confirmation, caring, and willingness to attend classes. Moreover, it aims to explore to what extent teacher caring and confirmation influence students' willingness to attend EFL classes and probe into the factors that can impact Chinese and Iranian students' willingness to attend EFL classes. To do so, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Do teacher confirmation and caring predict Chinese and Iranian students' willingness to attend EFL classes?
2. Are there any significant differences between Chinese and Iranian EFL students regarding their perceptions of confirmation, caring, and willingness to attend classes?
3. To what extent do teacher caring and confirmation influence students' willingness to attend EFL classes?
4. From Chinese and Iranian students' perspectives, what factors can play a role in their willingness to attend EFL classes?

3.2. Participants

The sample, chosen through convenience sampling, was targeted voluntarily from Chinese and Iranian EFL contexts. Initially, for the quantitative phase, the target Chinese and Iranian respondents were respectively 1006 and 532 EFL undergraduate students, whose ages ranged from 17 to 50, with BA or MA levels of education. To generalize the research results, both genders were surveyed, and they mainly came from different provinces of China and Iran. The demographic information of the participants is demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic information of the participants*

Background Information	Chinese	Iranian
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	407	144
Female	576	378
Others	4	5
Prefer not to specify	19	5
<i>Level of Education</i>		
BA	1006	463
<i>1st BA (Freshman)</i>	910	
<i>2nd BA (Sophomore)</i>	77	
<i>3rd BA (Junior)</i>	19	

Background Information	Chinese	Iranian
<i>4th BA (Senior)</i>		
MA		64
PhD		5
<i>Age Range</i>		
17	6	
18-20	872	183
21-28	128	310
29-50		39

For the following qualitative phase, through purposive sampling, smaller groups of 43 and 34 participants were respectively chosen from Chinese and Iranian quantitative samples based on their inclination and perceived ability to provide deeper insights about the issues under investigation.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. WTAC scale

This scale, developed by Rajabnejad et al. (2017), measures students' perceptions regarding their willingness to attend EFL classes. It has 25 items, the responses to which range from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The items assess components of Teacher knowledge (TK) (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7), Teacher methodology (TM) (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), Teacher care (TC) (15, 16, 17, 18), Teacher characteristics (TCH) (19, 20, 21), and Teacher environment (TE) (22, 23, 24, 25) (See Appendix A for items). Reverse scoring should be considered for items 4, 20, 21. Rajabnejad et al. (2017) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .83 for the scale, while in the present study, its Cronbach alpha coefficient was .96.

3.3.2. Teacher confirmation scale

Ellis (2000) developed this scale, measuring students' perceptions of teacher confirmation toward them. It has 27 items ranging in their responses from never (1) to almost always (5). There scale has four factors of Response to questions (Items 13, 11, 2, 21, 22), Demonstrated interest (Items 1, 20, 24, 3, 19, 7), Teaching style (Items 10, 23, 5, 25, 6), and Absence of disconfirmation (4, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 26, 27). Reverse scoring should be applied for items 4, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 27 (See Appendix B for items). Cronbach alpha coefficients of .95 and .90 were reported for this scale, respectively by Ellis (2000) and the present study researchers.

3.3.3. Teacher care scale

The teacher care scale, developed by Teven and McCroskey (1997) is a bi-polar 10-item instrument. The items are responded to on a seven-step continuum. The bipolar items are

for example 1) Cares about me/Doesn't care about me; 3) Self-centered/Not self-centered; 9) Under-stands how I feel /Doesn't understand how I feel (See Appendix C for items). Reverse scoring should be applied for items 1, 2, 6, 9. Cronbach alpha coefficients of .95 and .83 were reported for this scale, respectively by Teven and McCroskey (1997) and the present study researchers.

3.3.4. *Semi-structured interview*

To gather data in qualitative phase, a semi-structured one-to-one interview was held. Researchers developed three interview prompts, and to ensure their content validity, they presented the items to three expert researchers in applied linguistics. The experts, having made some changes to the language and sequence of the items, approved their content and linguistic appropriateness. See Appendix D for these interview items.

3.4. Data collection

To comply with ethical standards in doing educational research, participants were asked to sign a consent letter showing that they voluntarily took part in the study. Chinese and Iranian students answered the online questionnaires which were respectively prepared through Wenjuanxing and Google Form. For the qualitative phase, the students participated in an interview, lasting for around 15 minutes, run via Skype and Tencent Meeting. Data collection started in early June, 2021 and lasted for a period of 1.5 months. The participants were fully aware of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time for any discomfort.

3.5. Data analysis

For quantitative data, statistical analyses based on SPSS software (Version 22) were conducted to answer the first and second research questions. Next, qualitative data were inductively analyzed by both researchers to ensure investigator triangulation (Nassaji, 2020). To this aim, MAXQDA (Version 2020) software was employed. Coding qualitative data was informed by Gao and Zhang's (2020) model through which researchers (1) clean the data, (2) create open codes, (3) categorize relevant codes under sub-themes, (4) arrive at overarching themes, and (5) report and discuss the obtained codes and themes. To increase the trustworthiness of findings, the audit trail technique was employed. The inductive approach to content analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data. In contrast to deductive content analysis through which codes and themes are derived from existing frameworks or studies, in the inductive approach, codes and themes entirely are generated from the data (Creswell, 2012).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative Results

Before initiating the analysis, some pre-processes were to remove problematic data. Initially, 1538 (532 Iranian and 1006 Chinese) solid answers were obtained. No missing answer was found, and data were inspected for patterns. Thus, 195 cases (51 Iranian and

144 Chinese) with constant patterns, 37 cases (8 Iranian and 29 Chinese) with increasing patterns, and 15 cases (9 Iranian and 6 Chinese) with decreasing patterns were identified and removed. Subsequently, the standard deviation of participants' answers was calculated, and those with values below 0.5 were inspected for unengagement. Only one such case was found, leaving the final sample with 1290 cases (464 Iranian and 826 Chinese).

To ensure construct validity, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed. The initial model had three constructs (WTAC, Confirmation, and Care), two of which had a number of components, making the model a second-order one. First, each construct was probed for non-significant loadings in unstandardized estimation and/or low estimates (below 0.45) in standardized estimation (Appendix E shows the results).

As reported in Appendix E, no non-significant unstandardized estimates were found. However, 10 items, i.e., two items (W01 and W04) from teacher knowledge, two items (W20 and W21) from teacher characteristics, one item (W23) from teacher environment, one item (T22) from response to question, one item (T26) from the absence of disconfirmation, and three items (C03, C05, and C06) from teacher care had standardized estimates below 0.45; thus, they were excluded. Moreover, as the exclusion of W20 and W21 from teacher characteristics left this component with one item (W19) with no strong standardized estimate (i.e., .477), we decided to exclude this component from the analysis.

Next, modification indices with the threshold of 10 were checked, and suggestions that were not contradictory to the literature were applied. Figure 3 delineates the final modified CFA model with standardized estimates.

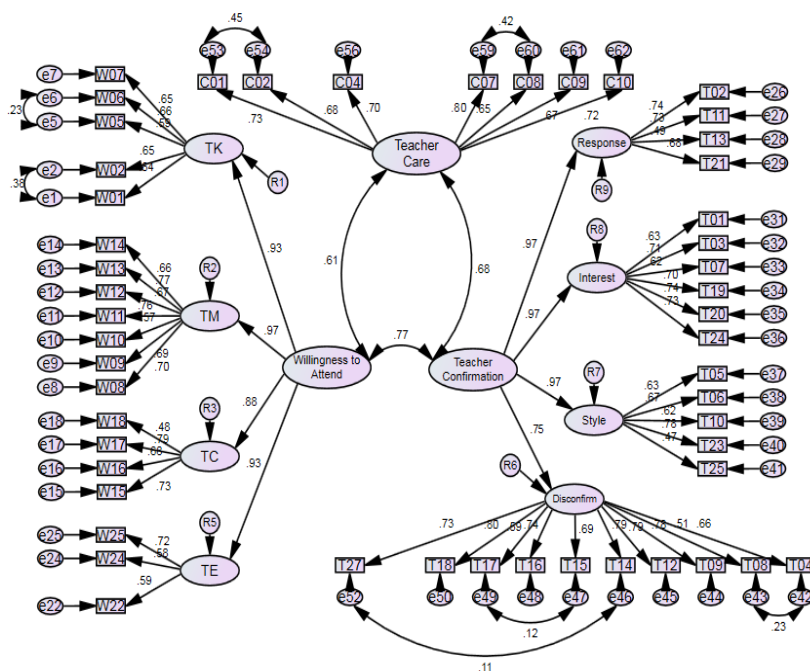


Figure 3. The final modified CFA model with standardized estimates

After applying modifications, the model's goodness of fit was examined. According to Hu and Bentler (1999), for the model to have goodness of fit, a number of criteria have to be met. These criteria, alongside values obtained from the data, are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. *Evaluation of the CFA goodness of fit*

Criteria		Threshold			Evaluation
		<i>Terrible</i>	<i>Acceptable</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	
CMIN	3478.87				
Df	1209				
CMIN/df	2.877	> 5	> 3	> 1	Excellent
RMSEA	.056	> 0.08	< 0.08	< 0.06	Excellent
CFI	.928	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
TLI	.924	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
SRMR	.051	> 0.1	> 0.08	< 0.08	Excellent

Results reported in Table 2 indicate acceptable to excellent goodness of fit. To make sure that the proposed model is applicable to participants from both cultures, measurement invariance was tested. The results of running the test on culture for the unconstrained model was $\chi^2(2418) = 5043.8$ and for the constrained model was $\chi^2(2433) = 5063.1$. Difference ($\Delta\chi^2(15) = 19.3$, $p = .20 > .05$) among the cultures at the model level was not significant. Therefore, the invariance of the model was ensured.

Next, as indicated in Table 3, discriminant validity and composite reliability (CR) for each factor were examined. CR values of all variables were above 0.7, which reveal acceptable reliability. The average variance explained for each factor was safely above .5, and the maximum shared variance (MSV) for each factor was below its AVE. These two conditions support the convergent validity of the model. Additionally, the square root of AVE (the bold values in the table) was above inter-correlations of the factors, indicating discriminant validity according to Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Table 3. *Validity and reliability of the factors*

	CR	AVE	MSV	Fornell - Larcker Criterion		
				Teacher Care	Willingness	Confirmation
Teacher Care	0.837	0.502	0.462	0.708		
Willingness	0.962	0.863	0.589	0.607**	0.929	
Confirmation	0.901	0.849	0.589	0.679**	0.768**	0.921

** Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

Inspection of correlations (values not in bold under Fornell-Larcker Criterion) documented that there are significant correlations between all pairs of factors. Strong correlations were found between confirmation and WTAC ($r = .768$), confirmation and care ($r = .679$), and WTAC and care ($r = .607$).

Using regression imputation, data in the CFA model was imputed for use in subsequent analysis. Regression imputation works like the calculation of average scores for each component, yet it is a more accurate measure as it considers the weighted share of each item in calculating average. Each item is weighted based on its share of explaining the average variance of its component. Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the imputed constructs.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics of the scores after regression imputation (N = 1290)*

		N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Teacher Care	Iranian	464	2.19	6.76	4.9949	.87801	-.292	-.164
	Chinese	826	2.50	6.77	5.2816	.93937	-.150	-.721
	Total	1290	2.19	6.77	5.1785	.92770	-.162	-.503
Willingness	Iranian	464	1.53	4.45	3.4410	.50556	-.644	.626
	Chinese	826	1.42	4.49	3.6598	.53277	-.707	1.133
	Total	1290	1.42	4.49	3.5811	.53340	-.623	.834
Confirmation	Iranian	464	1.25	4.74	3.6415	.57284	-.540	.564
	Chinese	826	1.18	4.75	3.9204	.56607	-.666	.576
	Total	1290	1.18	4.75	3.8201	.58385	-.585	.461

As reported in Table 4, distributions of scores showed normality as both skewness and kurtosis values were below absolute value of 3. To answer the first research question, a regression analysis using structural equation modeling was run to examine the predictability of WTAC by care and confirmation. The measurement model is presented in Figure 4.

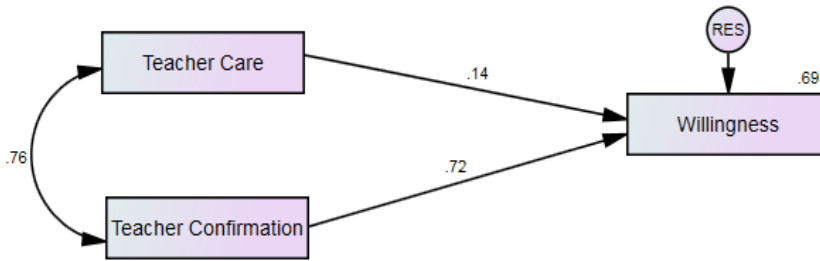


Figure 4. The measurement model

Table 5 reports the results of the analysis. It should be noted that, in running the analysis, the imputed values extracted from CFA were used.

Table 5. Results of multiple linear regression analysis with SEM

			Weight	S.E.	C.R.	P	β	R ²	Multiple correlation R ²
Willingness	<---	Teacher Care	.081	.014	5.931	.000	.141	.020	.689
Willingness	<---	Teacher Confirmation	.656	.022	30.136	.000	.718	.516	
Teacher Care	<-->	Teacher Confirmation	.410	.019	21.680	.000	.758		

As reported in Table 5, after taking into account covariance between confirmation and caring, the variables could jointly predict 68.9% of the variance in WTAC. Both variables were significant predictors of WTAC, among which confirmation was a better predictor ($\beta = .718, p = .000 < .01$), uniquely explaining 51.6% of the WTAC variance.

To answer the second research question, three sets of independent samples t-tests were run. As reported in Table 4, distributions showed normality, legitimizing running this kind of parametric test (Table 6).

Table 6. *Independent samples t-tests*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Teacher Care	Equal variances assumed	7.238	.007	-5.487	1014.457	.000	-.28669	.05225	-.38922	-.18417
	Not assumed									
Willingness	Equal variances assumed	.830	.363	-7.212	1288	.000	-.21888	.03035	-.27842	-.15934
	Not assumed									
Confirmation	Equal variances assumed	.015	.904	-8.455	1288	.000	-.27887	.03298	-.34357	-.21416
	Not assumed									

As reported in Table 6, for all variables, difference was significant at $p < .01$ with the Chinese participants significantly outperforming the Iranians.

4.2. Qualitative Results

Regarding the third research question, analysis of qualitative data revealed that 39 and 4 Chinese students believed that care predicts WTAC respectively to a great extent and to some extent. Moreover, 38 and 5 Chinese students believed that confirmation predicts WTAC respectively to a great extent and to some extent. Appendix F presents Chinese students' excerpts highlighting the role of care and confirmation in WTAC. Similarly, 30 and 4 Iranian students believed that care predicts WTAC respectively to a great extent and to some extent. Besides, 31 and 3 Iranian students believed that confirmation predicts WTAC respectively to a great extent and to some extent. Appendix G presents Iranian students' excerpts signifying the role of caring and confirmation in WTAC.

Figure 5 and Figure 6 present the analysis of the data pertaining to the fourth research question revealing different categories of factors mentioned by both groups to influence WTAC.

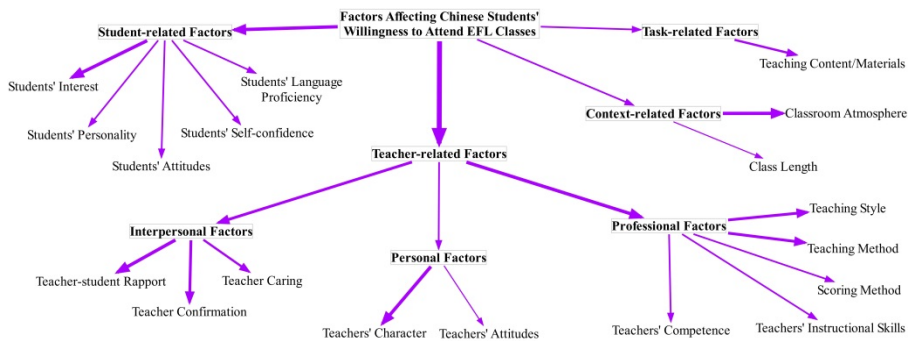


Figure 5. Factors affecting Chinese students' WTAC

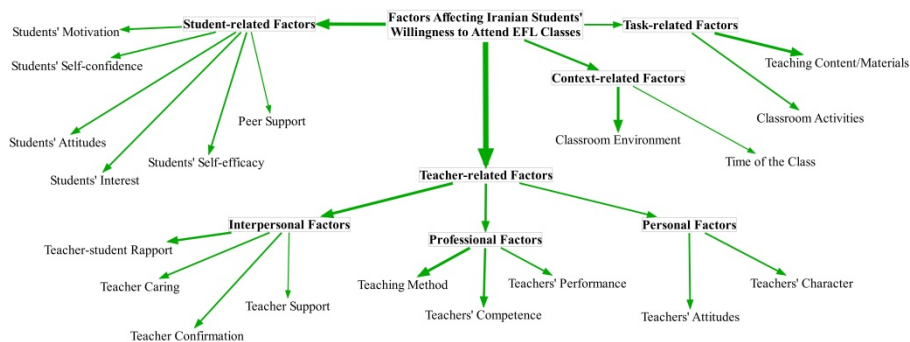


Figure 6. Factors affecting Iranian students' WTAC

More particularly, According to Figure 5 and Figure 6, both Chinese and Iranian participants referred to a range of student-, teacher-, context-, and task-related factors. Likewise, for both groups, the teacher-related factors category involved the largest portion of answers, including sub-categories of interpersonal, personal and professional factors playing role in WTAC. Furthermore, in line with the quantitative findings, for teacher interpersonal factors, both Chinese and Iranian groups referred to teacher-student rapport, teacher caring, confirmation, and support as communication instances enhancing WTAC.

6. DISCUSSION

To address the recent call for studying teacher interpersonal behaviors in L2 education (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021), in this research, by drawing on rhetorical/relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006), we did a cross-cultural comparison of the role of instructor care and confirmation in Chinese and Iranian EFL students' WTAC.

Concerning the first research question, results indicated that both confirmation and care were significant positive predictors of Chinese and Iranian EFL students' WTAC. These results find further empirical support to this theoretical proposition of rhetorical/relational goal theory that positive instructor interpersonal behaviors favorably influence students' educational outcomes including WTAC (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Furthermore, the positive role of confirmation for WTAC in this study is in congruence with findings of other studies reporting that instructor confirmation, as an example of instructor relationship-building behavior, improves students' motivation (Croucher et al., 2021), achievement (Hsu, 2012), engagement (LaBelle & Johnson, 2020), satisfaction (Goodboy et al., 2009), willingness to communicate, and involvement (Sidelinger et al., 2010). In fact, this finding is justifiable by the rhetorical/relational goal theory which explains that when teachers employ confirmation cues like answering students' questions, indicating concern for students' learning, and using an interactive teaching style (Burns et al., 2017), they convey this message to students that they are valuable. Thus, when students feel that teachers confirm their presence and importance, they are more prone to be present in classes.

Similarly, the positive influence of care on WTAC in this study first empirically supports rhetorical/relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006) and second is in congruence with results of previous studies which found that high levels of teacher care lead to students' improved performance, engagement, satisfaction, respect, learning, well-being, and motivation (Derakhshan et al., 2019; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Thus, it seems that when teachers show caring behaviors like being empathetic toward students, maintaining equal eye contact with all, and showing interest in students' learning (Gabrys-Barker, 2016), students' emotional and psychosocial needs are met (Noddings, 2012). Thus, they are more inclined toward being regularly present in classes.

Regarding the second research question, the results of three sets of independent samples t-tests showed significant differences between the two groups for their perceptions of care, confirmation, and WTAC, with Chinese participants, significantly outperforming Iranians. This result is in line with that of Pishghadam et al. (2021), showing a significant difference in Iranian and Iraqi students' perceptions of instructor credibility, stroke, effectiveness, and WTAC. This result can be explained by taking mentioning that while Chinese and Iranian cultures are both instances of Asian cultures, they have unique systems of thinking, conceiving, and acting (Wang, Derakhshan, & Rahimpour, 2022). Thus, Chinese and Iranian EFL students' different perceptions of care, confirmation, and WTAC are justifiable as the culture in which people live directly affects their belief systems (Klassen, 2004). Furthermore, the two groups' different levels of perception might be related to this argument that the cultural context in which teachers live constantly constructs and reconstructs the way they think, act, and teach and also the way their actions are perceived by students (Richards, 2014).

Concerning the third research question, content analysis of qualitative data revealed that, in line with the quantitative results, the majority of Chinese and Iranian students believed that both care and confirmation were significant predictors of WTAC. More particularly, in line with Noddings's (2012) conceptualization of care as an interpersonal behavior used to meet students' emotional and psychological needs, Chinese students explained that caring is a basic psychological need and if this need is satisfied, students are more willing to attend classes. This finding supports rhetorical/relational goal theory which posits that teachers' use of interpersonal behaviors helps meet students' relational goals, which in turn results in

better academic outcomes like WTAC (Mottet et al., 2006). Similarly, they mentioned that when teachers show confirmation of students' presence and value by respecting, loving, and paying attention to students, teachers could create a friendlier classroom atmosphere, which promotes enthusiasm for class presence. This finding is in line with those of Pishghadam et al. (2019) and Pishghadam et al. (2021) which showed that credibility and stroke as two teacher positive interpersonal variables could increase Iranian and Iraqi students' WTAC. In the same vein, in this study, Iranian students believed that teachers' caring for students' needs and enacting confirming behaviors that improve the relationship with students motivate students to attend classes regularly. This finding supports previous empirical evidence which showed that teacher confirmation and care can positively predict students' academic outcomes (Croucher et al., 2021; Derakhshan, 2022a).

As for the fourth research question, analyses of further qualitative data revealed that both Chinese and Iranian participants named a spectrum of student-, teacher-, context-, and task-related factors as predictors of WTAC. Similarly, for both groups, teacher-related factors involved the largest portion of answers. As mentioned by Borg (2018), teacher effective professional practice is one of the essential cornerstones of building a successful educational system. Furthermore, in line with the quantitative findings, among the teacher interpersonal factors, both Chinese and Iranian groups referred to teacher-student rapport, teacher caring, confirmation, and support as communication instances enhancing WTAC. This finding implies that a number of factors influence students' WTAC. However, the prominence of teacher-related factors in both groups' findings reflects the crucial role of teachers in students' academic performance. This is in line with the findings of Derakhshan, Doliński, et al. (2022) which found that for both Iranian and Polish groups of EFL university students, teacher interpersonal factors were the most contributing elements to their engagement.

Overall, all quantitative and qualitative results indicate that teachers' interpersonal behaviors permeate every aspect of education, one of its most important ones is WTAC (Pishghadam et al., 2021). In line with this finding, McIntyre et al. (2020) state that "teachers make great impact ... in every moment of classroom learning" and "teachers' moment-to-moment behaviours create an ever-evolving picture of who the teacher is" (p. 1). More particularly, as revealed through the results of the fourth research question, among the teacher qualities raised by Chinese and Iranian EFL students, teacher positive interpersonal communication behaviors were the most significant contributors to WTAC. This finding is associated with those of previous studies, highlighting the desideratum of teacher positive interpersonal behaviors for enhancing students' attendance, functioning, and learning (e.g., Croucher et al., 2021; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

6. IMPLICATIONS

The results obtained in this study can enhance the knowledge and practice of stakeholders in L2 education. To start with, by pursuing such new findings in the area of instructional communication research, EFL teachers can broaden their perspectives toward responsibilities in classroom and understand that teachers' effectiveness encompasses not only successful conveying of L2 knowledge but more importantly quality interpersonal relationships with

students. By becoming aware of positive communication behaviors like confirmation and caring, teachers are empowered to provide an enjoyable classroom environment and as a result increase WTAC. Furthermore, such findings can guide the practice of teacher educators as they can regard knowledge of how to effectively communicate with students as an essential lynchpin to what they teach in teacher education programs.

Teacher educators are expected to attend to teachers' continuing professional development needs in such programs (Derakhshan et al., 2020) by preparing teachers for skillfully tackling the day-to-day challenges of language teaching, one of which is how to maintain students' enthusiasm for regularly attending classes. Accordingly, teacher educators can develop teachers' knowledge of communication behaviors like care, immediacy, clarity, or confirmation. Besides, our findings can aid students' parents to better understand reasons for students' (dis)inclination to attend classes and understand the significant role that teachers play in this process. Finally, through these findings, policymakers and instructor recruitment committees can place communication behaviors in the spotlight when employing EFL teachers.

The present study investigated the role of care and confirmation in WTAC. Future studies can address the role of other teacher communication behaviors like immediacy, clarity, humor, or interactional justice for reaching a more comprehensive view of different teacher relationship-building tendencies in EFL classes. Second, this study targeted students from China and Iran. Future researchers can engage in multi-cultural investigations of students from other cultures like those in Japan, Italy, Poland, Spain, or Germany. Third, in the current research, only students' perceived WTAC was investigated. Other researchers can explore what influences teacher communication behaviors have on students' actual rate of class attendance. Fourth, this study unraveled students' WTAC where the target language was English. Future studies can replicate the current study in classes of other foreign languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Italian, or French. Moreover, such a replication study can be done in English as a medium of instruction context where English is used as a means to convey content knowledge to students in higher education.

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Funding: This study is supported by The People's Government of Henan Province, Mainland China under the Research Project Grant No. (2021BXW007).

Acknowledgments: This work was supported by Henan University, Mainland China. This university has no role in the design and implementation of this study. The authors are also grateful to the insightful comments suggested by the editor and the anonymous reviewers.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix A. WTAC Scale (Rajabnejad et al., 2017)

	Totally Agree	Agree	No Idea	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1. On the whole, I attend classes because the teachers' knowledge is up-to-date.					
2. I attend classes because the teacher has complete mastery of the course materials.					
3. I attend classes because the course materials are difficult.					
4. I am not willing to attend classes because course content is not useful.					
5. I am willing to attend classes because the course content is relevant to my everyday life.					
6. I attend classes because I want the course content to motivate me.					
7. On the whole, I attend classes because the course content is consistent with my level of education.					
8. I attend classes in which the teaching methodology of the teacher is good.					
9. I attend classes because the teacher answers my questions well.					
10. I am willing to attend classes because I have a large share in class discussions.					
11. On the whole, I am willing to attend classes because the teachers teach in a very creative way.					
12. It is the high speech power of the teacher that leads me to attend classes.					
13. I am willing to attend classes because the teacher explains the lessons very well.					
14. I attend classes for which the teacher has an orderly and coherent plan.					
15. The attention that the teacher pays to me increases my motivation to attend classes.					
16. I like to attend classes in which my attitude is important to the teacher.					
17. I attend classes because the teacher understands my progress and encourages me.					
18. I am willing to attend classes because the teacher knows my name.					
19. I attend classes because the teacher has a sense of humor.					
20. I am not willing to attend classes because the teacher does not respect me.					
21. I am not willing to attend classes because the teacher is serious and tough.					
22. I attend classes because language learning happens in the environment.					
23. I attend classes because language learning is not possible without attending classes.					
24. I am willing to attend classes because class competitiveness makes me progress.					
25. I am willing to attend classes because the class atmosphere is friendly and intimate.					

Appendix B. Teacher confirmation scale. Responses range from never (1) to almost always (5) (Ellis, 2000)

1. Communicates that he/she is interested in whether students are learning.
2. Indicates that he/she appreciates students' questions or comments.
3. Makes an effort to get to know students.
4. Belittles or puts students down when they participate in class.
5. Checks on students' understanding before going on to the next point.
6. Gives oral or written feedback on students' work.
7. Establishes eye contact during class lectures.
8. Talks down to students.*
9. Is rude in responding to some students' comments or questions during class.*
10. Uses an interactive teaching style.
11. Listens attentively when students ask questions or make comments during class.
12. Displays arrogant behavior.*
13. Takes time to answer students' questions fully.
14. Embarrasses students in front of the class.*
15. Communicates that he/she doesn't have time to meet with students.*
16. Intimidates students.*
17. Shows favoritism to certain students.*
18. Puts students down when they go to the teacher for help outside of class.*
19. Smiles at the class.
20. Communicates that he/she believes that students can do well in the class.
21. Is available for questions before and after class.
22. Is unwilling to listen to students who disagree.*
23. Uses a variety of teaching techniques to help students understand course material.
24. Asks students how they think the class is going and/or how assignments are coming along.
25. Incorporates exercises into lectures when appropriate.
26. Is willing to deviate slightly from the lecture when students ask questions.
27. Focuses on only a few students during class while ignoring others.*

Appendix C. Teacher Care Scale. Each item provides a seven-step continuum for the response (Teven & McCroskey, 1997)

1. Cares about me/Doesn't care about me
2. Has my interest at heart/Doesn't have my interest at heart
3. Self-centered/Not self-centered
4. Unconcerned with me/Concerned with me
5. Insensitive/Sensitive
6. Empathetic/Apathetic
7. Not understanding/Understanding
8. Unresponsive/Responsive
9. Understand how I feel/Doesn't understand how I feel
10. Doesn't understand how I think/Understands how I think

Appendix D. Interview questions

1. Do you think that teachers' caring for students affects students' willingness to attend English classes? If yes, how? (Please explain).
2. "Teacher confirmation is defined as teachers' communicative efforts to show to learners that they are important (Ellis, 2000)". Based on this definition, do you think that teachers' confirmation influences students' willingness to attend English classes? If yes, how? (Please explain).
3. From your perspective, what factors can play a role in students' willingness to attend English classes? (Please mention as many factors as you can think of).

Appendix E. Unstandardized and standardized estimates of the initial CFA model

		Unstandardized				Standardized
		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Estimate
W01	<--- TK	1.000				.685
W02	<--- TK	.995	.045	22.030	.000	.695
W03	<--- TK	.235	.048	4.872	.000	.146
W04	<--- TK	.486	.056	8.638	.000	.260
W05	<--- TK	.958	.049	19.373	.000	.602
W06	<--- TK	.954	.045	21.332	.000	.670
W07	<--- TK	.863	.042	20.731	.000	.649
W08	<--- TM	1.000				.699
W09	<--- TM	1.061	.046	23.289	.000	.690
W10	<--- TM	1.029	.053	19.380	.000	.571
W12	<--- TM	1.082	.048	22.726	.000	.673
W13	<--- TM	1.127	.044	25.738	.000	.766
W14	<--- TM	.929	.042	22.226	.000	.657
W15	<--- TC	1.000				.725
W16	<--- TC	.913	.041	22.516	.000	.679
W17	<--- TC	1.100	.042	25.905	.000	.790
W18	<--- TC	.818	.051	16.027	.000	.481
W19	<--- TCH	1.000				.477
W20	<--- TCH	.289	.071	4.052	.000	.089
W21	<--- TCH	.367	.062	5.905	.000	.133
W22	<--- TE	1.000				.592
W23	<--- TE	.648	.070	9.317	.000	.293
W24	<--- TE	1.029	.062	16.677	.000	.582
W25	<--- TE	1.213	.062	19.466	.000	.729
T02	<--- Response	1.000				.726
T11	<--- Response	.988	.039	25.264	.000	.718
T13	<--- Response	.854	.051	16.749	.000	.481
T21	<--- Response	1.030	.043	23.695	.000	.674
T22	<--- Response	.438	.062	7.083	.000	.205
T01	<--- Interest	1.000				.603
T03	<--- Interest	1.164	.056	20.706	.000	.702
T07	<--- Interest	1.214	.065	18.803	.000	.617
T19	<--- Interest	1.181	.058	20.505	.000	.693

		Unstandardized				Standardized
		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Estimate
T20	<--- Interest	1.127	.053	21.386	.000	.735
T24	<--- Interest	1.279	.060	21.239	.000	.728
T05	<--- Style	1.000				.602
T06	<--- Style	1.145	.058	19.584	.000	.653
T10	<--- Style	1.137	.060	18.907	.000	.623
T23	<--- Style	1.256	.057	22.132	.000	.775
T25	<--- Style	.840	.057	14.755	.000	.460
T04	<--- Disconfirm	1.000				.670
T08	<--- Disconfirm	.811	.047	17.295	.000	.519
T09	<--- Disconfirm	1.041	.042	24.897	.000	.777
T12	<--- Disconfirm	1.088	.043	25.297	.000	.792
T14	<--- Disconfirm	1.030	.040	25.473	.000	.798
T15	<--- Disconfirm	.930	.041	22.506	.000	.692
T16	<--- Disconfirm	.993	.042	23.735	.000	.735
T17	<--- Disconfirm	.825	.042	19.659	.000	.596
T18	<--- Disconfirm	1.048	.041	25.412	.000	.796
T26	<--- Disconfirm	.185	.036	5.118	.000	.149

		Unstandardized				Standardized
		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Estimate
C01	<--- Teacher Care	1.000				.655
C02	<--- Teacher Care	.910	.048	19.120	.000	.613
C03	<--- Teacher Care	.438	.053	8.284	.000	.250
C04	<--- Teacher Care	.875	.047	18.611	.000	.594
C05	<--- Teacher Care	.442	.045	9.798	.000	.297
C06	<--- Teacher Care	.692	.048	14.357	.000	.445
C07	<--- Teacher Care	.998	.044	22.483	.000	.746
C08	<--- Teacher Care	.878	.041	21.334	.000	.699
C09	<--- Teacher Care	1.000	.049	20.488	.000	.665
C10	<--- Teacher Care	.942	.045	21.102	.000	.689

Appendix F. Chinese students' opinions regarding the role of teacher caring and confirmation in students' WTAC

<i>For one point, teachers' caring is a basic psychological need. If this need is satisfied, students will have more confidence and pride, which may lead them to attend and learn seriously and actively.</i>
<i>If the teacher always cares about me, because I feel respected and loved, I will attend the class actively.</i>
<i>Since teachers' caring will make students feel that they are receiving attention, they will be more willing to take part in class activities.</i>
<i>Teacher caring creates a friendly atmosphere, gives student this impression that he/she is special, being noticed, thus encouraging the student to react in a more active way in the class.</i>
<i>Teachers' caring would also help students to develop interest in English learning. When students are at ease in class, they, of course, are willing to attend English class.</i>
<i>Caring from teachers can stimulate a good relationship between the teacher and student. Thus, students will be more willing to attend classes to help teacher finish classes successfully.</i>
<i>Teachers' concern for students will make students feel more involved and present, stimulate their interest in learning, and make students more willing to participate in English courses.</i>
<i>When a teacher affirms and praises me, I feel valued and talented in English study. I will be more willing to invest more energy in and out of English class.</i>
<i>When I am confirmed, I will become more confident and be aware that I am good enough to do more.</i>
<i>I think teacher confirmation can help students build confidence in learning, and help students realize that they are valuable individuals, so that they can avoid negative feelings of inferiority.</i>
<i>Teachers' confirmation, which is also a kind of encouragement, will make the students have a sense of achievement when they finished the questions or the tasks given by their teachers.</i>
<i>Gaining confirmation from teachers can give students more confidence to devote themselves to studying because students realize their value for their teachers and therefore, will be more willing to attend English classes.</i>
<i>Teachers' confirmation will play an important role in arousing the students' enthusiasm for classes.</i>

Appendix G. Iranian students' opinions regarding the role of teacher caring and confirmation in students' WTAC

<i>Teacher can motivate students to be engaged in the process of learning by his or her caring behavior.</i>
<i>Teacher caring for students' wants, needs, and affection will exert a tremendously important influence on a student's willingness to attend English classes.</i>
<i>When a teacher cares for the students, they feel like their efforts are being seen and someone is paying attention to their learning process.</i>
<i>By receiving much care and attention, the students become more confident, and as a bond is created between the student and the teacher, in order to socialize more with the teacher, they tend to participate more, respect the class more, and do their best more.</i>
<i>When teachers care about students' feelings, needs, and learning styles, students perceive that they are important to the teacher and thus their enthusiasm for attending the class increases.</i>
<i>I think if teachers care about the students they are more willing to attend the class.</i>
<i>Teacher confirmation greatly increases the presence of students in classroom because humans are fascinated by approval and want to be seen as important and effective.</i>
<i>Student learning can be positively impacted by the encouragement of teachers to their students.</i>
<i>I do believe that the teacher's confirmation builds or increases students' self-esteem and therefore, it would be easier for them to learn and join the class actively.</i>
<i>Teacher confirmation is a reward to the students' hard work so of course the sense of fulfillment can affect students' willingness to attend the class.</i>