A Qualitative Exploration of Emotional Intelligence in English as Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: Evidence from Iraq and the Czech Republic

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Abstract: This study endeavored to discuss certain aspects of Emotional Intelligence (EI) that are related to foreign language (FL) teaching and learning in two different contexts (Iraq and the Czech Republic). It outlined the areas that could be important for FL teachers and may be useful in FL learning. The countries of Iraq and the Czech Republic are culturally different, but in both of them, English is considered as the foreign language. This cross-cultural study attempted to unravel the current status and extent of the presence of EI in English as foreign language university classes of these two countries. Two samples, each including 20 EFL university teachers, were chosen as the participants. The participants responded to a close-ended questionnaire and participated in an interview. Textual data were content analyzed manually, and frequency and percentage were also reported. The findings revealed that there were dissimilarities in how EI was applied in the two geographical contexts. While the majority of Iraqi teachers considered EI an important element of online teaching and class management, the majority of Czech teachers did not regard it as important and necessary for effective learning and teaching. In addition, both samples agreed that teachers and students face more challenges in online EFL classes compared to traditional face-to-face classes. Moreover, many teachers from both groups, notably from the Iraqi sample, reported to be using a variety of EI tactics in their classes, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Online Education, Cross-Cultural Comparison, English as a Foreign Language.

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Introduction

The concept of Emotional intelligence (EI) has recently drawn enough attention to itself by researchers, worldwide, not only in the domain of psychological studies but also in applied linguistics and language-related research. Following this line of research, the present paper attempted to explore the importance of EI in online Foreign Language (FL) learning and teaching as this aspect of EI has not been widely studied. In fact, there is still much space for a detailed analysis of EI in online FL classes that can lead to theoretical and pedagogical implications for FL practice and research. When discussing the notion of emotions in FL learning and teaching, it is critical to underline the importance of the different senses as they connect us to the outside world. Hence, it could be stated that the extent that senses are involved in a person's task participation affects his/her degree of emotionality in that particular undertaking (Miri & Pishghadam, 2021). In addition, Pishghadam, Jajarmi, and Shayesteh (2016) stated that "individuals can construct their idiosyncratic understanding of the world through their senses" (p. 14). For instance, some FL students, who are unfamiliar with the term "Pitaya", would have no emotion toward it because they have never heard, seen, felt, or tasted this fruit. FL learners with more familiarity with the word in terms of the senses involved, on the other hand, would have a higher level of emotions. The connection between the self, individuals, and the world happens because of the existing senses involved in one's daily experiences (Pishghadam & Shakeebaee, 2020). Therefore, it is possible to claim that the individual's emotions are always in the state of evolving as a result of the continuing perceptions, experiences, and feelings that one has over his/her life. One's level of emotions can influence various aspects of his/her life, including his/her experiences in the educational context. For this reason, it is important to study the role that one's emotions and level of EI play in the FL online education context.

Because emotions are among the important elements of FL education (Shayesteh, Pishghadam, & Moghimi, 2019), it is important to know more about how teachers regulate their own and their students' emotions (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019). In the recent era, educators have focused their attention on EI, and the concept has recently gained a lot of attention to itself. Teachers' and students' emotions pervade all aspects of education because educating the head without educating the heart is no education at all. The issue for all educators is to figure out how to teach in a way that prioritizes and considers the emotional aspects of learning and teaching. Learners' emotions in the FL classroom have been compared to those of wild horses, which, in the

hands of a good instructor, can be harnessed fruitfully towards increased language learning (Dewaele, 2015). Among all of them, the concept of EI is gaining more importance in the disciplines of general education and FL learning and teaching. According to Goleman (1998), there is a mismatch between the process of effective learning and students' academic performance that may be bridged through the increasing levels of EI.

Online education and its urgent use today as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic put heavy emphasis on learners. One of the biggest issues of online education is that it can spread feelings of anxiety and depression among students. Students of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs are very likely to experience one of these two things: language difficulties and/or lack of motivation. This situation requires real and effective solutions to support the learners emotionally in order to gain the best results of their language learning where emotions and learning a language correlate positively. EI strategies provide the possibility of exponential growth in students' language competencies and can help students who want to learn a new language to improve, lay new foundations for learning, learn emotion-related words, and become more aware of their use.

Many studies confirm the necessity of studying EI in relation to language teaching (e.g., Akbari, 2020; Borsipour, Pishghadam, & Meidani, 2019; Derakhshan, Eslami, & Ghandhari, 2021; Miri & Pishghadam, 2021; Pishghadam & Shakeebaee, 2020; Shayesteh et al., 2019), which leads to the significance of focusing on this specific area. There exist two novelties to be addressed in relation to this research topic: first, its investigation in imposed online teaching during the spread of COVID-19, and considering it in two geographically and culturally distinct settings. Putting English teachers under the spotlight is due to the notable role of their EI in many factors, including students' attitudes towards language learning (Saeidi & Nikou, 2012), academic engagement (Greenier, Derakhshan, & Fathi, 2021), motivation (Alavinia, Bonyadi, & Razavi, 2012), achievement (Pishghadam & Shakeebaee, 2020), and willingness to read (Borsipour et al., 2019).

Furthermore, doing cross-cultural research is necessary to comprehend the social, organizational, instructional, and individual elements that differently influence educational technology use and application (Tarhini, Hone, & Liu, 2015), (Tawafak, Malik, & Alfarsi, (2021), in different cultures. It is worth mentioning that cross-cultural studies are also important and need to be taken into consideration as recommended by Huang and Mingte (2003), who stated that "information systems research reveals that there are different technology adoption and usage patterns when the cultural difference is taken into account" (p. 383). The proliferation of the awareness of the humanistic learning elements (Al-Obaydi, 2021) and empowering teachers

towards ethical considerations in online teaching are among the key elements that have been arisen by technological growth conditions. Therefore, this study intends to shed light on the cross-cultural differences between Iraqi and the Czech higher education contexts regarding the current status of emotional intelligence in online EFL classes.

Previous studies have offered different models of EI: the trait model (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), the ability model (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), and the mixed model (Goleman, 2011; Tawafak, Romli, & Arshah, 2018). In this study, following Goleman's (2011) model, we attempted to provide a comprehensive view of the online English language situations of the two countries by investigating their main characteristics. These characteristics, according to Goleman's (2011) model, are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Moreover, we also formulated several subsequent questions based on Goleman's (2011) model that enables us to more deeply analyze the situation, bring a wider perspective on the phenomena under investigation, and provide some pedagogical implications based on our findings in L2 education. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the Iraqi and Czech EFL teachers' conceptions of EI in online EFL classes?

2. Do Iraqi and Czech EFL teachers intentionally use any specific strategies to enhance EI in online classes?

3. Do Iraqi and Czech EFL teachers think that there could be significant differences in an online foreign language context between individuals with low and high EI?

4. Do Iraqi and Czech EFL teachers use any specific strategies to construct an emotionally rich teaching environment in online classes?

Literature Review

EI is not a new concept; it has been discussed and researched in many streams of psychology since 1990. The first to use the term was Mayer and Salovey (1990). The term "emotional intelligence" was coined and characterized as "a subset of social intelligence"; intelligence that includes the ability to keep track of one's own and others' activities. To distinguish between feelings and emotions and to apply this knowledge to one's feelings and actions, EI was considered an element in gauging individuals' intellect (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In books and scholarly publications, several scientists and researchers have defined the phrase "emotional intelligence" and implemented it in their psychological theorization. Researchers have defined and conceptualized EI differently based on their unique viewpoints and intellectual approaches, but they have prepared the ground for a scientific analysis of its importance.

To start with, Goleman (1995) characterized EI as the ability to inspire oneself to persevere in the face of setbacks, to control impulse and expect gratification, to manage one's mood, and keep distressed from obliterating one's ability to reason, empathize, and hope. Furthermore, according to Baron (2006), the term EL is linked to emotional and social competencies and capabilities. EI aids individuals in the expression and management of daily requirements interactions. Although Mayer and Salovey (1990) used the phrase EI, they did it from a different perspective. They believed that EI had something to do with a person's ability to effectively handle emotions and emotional responses. They defined EI as the ability to monitor one's own and others' moods and emotions, to distinguish between them, and to apply that information to direct one's thoughts and actions. The word "EI" is the combination of the terms "emotion" with "intelligence". Emotions are one of the three essential kinds of mental operations according to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000). Motivation, emotion, and intellect all play a role in a person's life that is cheerful. When a person thinks positively, he or she is more productive. As a result, EI implies that emotion and intelligence are linked together. EI, according to Baron and Parker (2000), can grow in individuals as a result of a variety of life experiences. EI helps teachers and students to effectively manage their emotions to create an emotionally positive learning and teaching environment. It is promising to consider that EI training can increase teachers' performance and well-being (Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokk, 2014), as well as their emotional skills (Brackett & Katulak, 2006; Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Low and Nelson (2006) asserted that having high levels of EI provides individuals with a distinct advantage, whether in terms of academic pursuits or career advancements. In addition, they stated that EI is important for students' personal health and academic achievements. Moreover, they mentioned that students with higher EI skills are better equipped to deal with complex and demanding academic environments. The ability gap among English learners is one of the issues that English teachers and university instructors face. Students' intelligence level can influence their English learning; yet, their success or failure is not simply dependent on their level of intelligence. As a result, it has been suggested that the higher levels of emotional intelligence an English learner has, the more successful he or she will be. This conclusion is in line with the findings of many researchers who confirmed the essential role of EI in students' English language learning (Aghasafari, 2006; Chao, 2003; Méndez López, 2011; Motallebzadeh & Azizi, 2012; Shakib & Barani, 2011). Greenier et al. (2021), in their recent study, confirmed the role of emotion regulation and psychological well-being on the

work engagement of British and Iranian English teachers. Their findings recommend that emotion regulation and psychological well-being are positive predictors of work engagement, and some cross-cultural differences were identified in the two cultural contexts.

In the same vein, Pishghadam (2009a) argued that EI, verbal intelligence, and psychometric intelligence affect Iranian EFL university students' academic accomplishments. He found that academic success is highly linked to numerous aspects of EI, such as intrapersonal competencies, general mood competencies, and stress management. On the other hand, Moafian and Ghanizadeh (2009) conducted a study to look into the association between EI and self-efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers who worked at private language institutes. The results indicated that there was a link between teachers' EI and their self-efficacy. The results of all these studies show the role of EI in English language learning and teaching at school and university contexts. The present study differs from the previous ones in that, while previous studies considered EI in physical face-to-face classes and in one cultural context, the present study investigated EI in online English classes of two culturally distinct contexts in Iraq and the Czech Republic.

Method

Setting and Participants

The participants included college and university EFL teachers in two countries of Iraq and the Czech Republic. These two countries are culturally different, but they are similar in that English is taught and learned as a foreign language in both contexts. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, the requirement to use technology has been tipping the scales all around the world, and education is not an exception in this regard. Thus, online education was enforced in many parts of the world at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. The imposed nature of using technology these days can bring about undesirable experiences in the virtual instructional context. Therefore, teachers' level of EI and how effectively they can manage emotions might affect their online teaching practice. To address this issue, EI was investigated at two online higher education settings in Iraq and the Czech Republic.

Colleges and institutions in Iraq, where life has been unstable for the past four decades, have been doing their part to educate students and combat digital literacy by incorporating particular computer subjects into secondary, intermediate, and higher education levels. In the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the teaching and testing occurred completely online. In that year, a variety of internet apps and platforms were used. Due to a lack of experience in

online teaching and learning, the situation was difficult respectively for teachers and students. For the academics and decision-makers, it was a period of fear and uncertainty. After successfully completing online classes and exams in the first year of the pandemic, the ministry of education in Iraq opted to use online education for the second year, because it was the only option available.

In the academic years 2020-2021, distance learning was used in universities and colleges for all disciplines except human medicine, which was barred from a comprehensive online study. The platforms that are used are governed by the decisions of each university council. Students and teachers were trained to use Google Classroom and Google meet for teaching and running exams at the University of Diyala. The University of Diyala is located in the governorate of Diyala, which is known for its diversity and variety. With different cultures, sects, and nations, it is a culturally diversified metropolis (Al-Obaydi, 2021). Arabic is the predominant language, and English is spoken as an L2.

A similar situation has been experienced in the Czech Republic regarding the implementation of various forms of online education, such as eLearning, blended learning, or hybrid learning, in the education system at its various levels. The trend has recently been strongly supported by the global pandemic during which basically all education was run digital, both at basic schools and universities. The University of Hradec Kralove where the research was conducted has been using MS Teams and Blackboard platforms to conduct all courses, both in the Czech language and also English during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Adopting a random sampling method, 20 Iraqi and 20 Czech EFL teachers were selected. The sample choice was based on two main factors: being an English language college teacher and running online classes as the main form of teaching. Table 1 depicts the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of the Participants*

Demographic Information	Iraq (N)	Percentage	Czech Republic (N)	Percentage
Gender				

Male	8	40%	10	50%
Female	12	60%	10	50%
Age				
25-30	4	20%	0	0%
30-35	5	25%	5	25%
35-40	8	40%	5	25%
More than 40 years	3	15%	10	50%
Job				
School teachers	0	0%	0	0%
College teachers	20	100%	20	100%
Total	20	100%	20	100%

Instruments

To obtain the required data, two instruments were used, namely an interview and a questionnaire based on Goleman's (2011) model. Goleman's (2011) model consists of some characteristics including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. This model deals with emotional intelligence as a system of emotional and social skills and competencies and is usually known as a trait model of emotional intelligence. The participants took part in interviews and subsequently responded to the items of the close-ended questionnaire (Table 5),. The interview prompts are presented in the Appendix.

Data Collection Process

Four interview questions were asked during the semi-structured interview sessions from all the participants. Each interview lasted for about 20 to 30 minutes, and they were all conducted in October 2021. Moreover, it took the participants around five minutes to respond to the close-ended questionnaire. The respondents had gained sufficient experience with online teaching during the previous academic year that was held thoroughly in an online mode, and this interview aimed at analyzing their experience from that period. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for later content analysis.

All necessary ethical requirements regarding privacy were followed and all the respondents expressed their agreement with the interview and its recording. No personal data were collected, all interviews were anonymized, and no names or any other personal identification were used when reporting the data. The research was approved by the Ethics

Committee of the University of Hradec Kralove no. 2/2021. All GDPR requirements were followed, and participation in this research was fully voluntary.

Data Analysis

For the qualitative phase which was done through running interviews, it should be noted that the face validity of the interview prompts was confirmed after submitting it to a panel of experts in the disciplines of education, psychology, and language teaching at the University of Diyala in Iraq. The experts agreed that the prompts were appropriate for this study. The test-retest method and inter-rater reliability were used to confirm the questionnaire's reliability. The reliability coefficient of the test-retest was 0.82, which is regarded as satisfactory. The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed in the inter-rater technique, and the result was 0.81, which is likewise satisfactory dependability. To analyze the textual data elicited through interviews, content and thematic analyses were performed following Gao and Zhang's (2020) and Tawafak et al.'s (2018) five steps of 1) cleaning the original data, 2) generating codes, 3)generating themes, 4) categorizing themes, and 5) presenting a detailed report of the results. Moreover, frequency counts and percentages were computed for the scores obtained from running the close-ended questionnaire and also for the themes obtained from the interview data in this study.

Results

The results start with the analysis of the interview data, and next, it presents the results of the close-ended questionnaire in each context separately.

Interview Results

The first prompt used in the interview is as follows:

1. What does EI in online EFL classes mean to you? How do you think it could improve the class atmosphere?

As the sample consists of 40 college teachers from the two aforementioned contexts, the results of each group were presented separately to give a space for cross-cultural comparison. In the Iraqi context, the answers of teachers to these interview prompts showed that most of them were attempting to insert EI in their classes unintentionally by behaving positively and caringly toward their students and trying to facilitate the process of online teaching by making

the class livelier. Table 2 shows the results pertaining to the Iraqi and Czech samples with percentages for the first interview prompt.

Table 2. *The Results of Iraqi and Czech data pertaining to the First Interview Prompt (Part I)*

Themes	Iraqi (N)	Percentage	Czech (N)	Percentage
The essential part of the online teaching process and class management	15	75%	5	25%
Not paying any attention to EI as a separate psychological merit in class.	4	20%	14	70%
Not finding time for such things as EI in online teaching.	1	5%	1	5%

The differences in the responses of the two countries presented in the form of themes are visible as the majority of Iraqi teachers considered EI as an integral part of the teaching process; while, in the Czech sample, the teachers admitted that they did not pay sufficient attention to the importance of EI in the teaching process. Iraqi teachers seemed to be more aware of the impact of EI on the teaching process, and for them, it was very important as they mentioned how much it could have an impact on the class (Tawafak et al., 2018).

Table 3 shows the results of the second part of the first interview prompt asking the teachers regarding their attitude toward how EI employment might affect the class atmosphere. According to the table, the results are very similar, and the differences are not significant. Both groups considered EI useful in aiding the students with studying, changing their mood, decreasing anxiety, and improving communication.

Table 3. *The Results of Question 1 (Part II)*

Themes	Iraq (N)	Percentage	Czech Republic (N)	Percentage

EI helps in changing the mood of students, decreasing their anxiety, increasing interaction and communication, and increasing the rapport between teacher and students.	15	75%	17	85%
Not thinking that EI is really important in improving the class atmosphere.	3	15%	0	0%
I don't know.	2	10%	3	15%

The interviews with the teachers revealed many important aspects of EI presence or implementation in the online L2 learning context in the two countries. As the research aimed at a cross-cultural comparison of the two groups, the results are presented separately for Iraqi and Czech samples. Teachers' responses were varied based on their personality and also their style of teaching. Therefore, some of them used various aspects of EI intentionally as part of their duty to create a positive class environment, and some of them did not pay attention to using it as we can see from their responses such as:

To me, as a person and instructor, I believe that it is an essential part of my job to understand the emotions of my students toward me, the topic I teach, their daily struggles, etc. This understanding will definitely enable me to present a better lesson. However, this whole process is not easy in online classes. Although the voice can tell part of the human emotion, nothing can be compared to face-to-face interactions and eye contact. So, EI matters in all cases, but not very much in online situations.

Another answer from an Iraqi teacher to the interview prompt was:

It means the ability to understand, use, and manage my emotions in positive ways. Yes, it could improve the lecture environment via communicating with others effectively, increasing leadership ability and group performance, managing the learners' emotions and behaviors and improving my decision-making. This respondent is very clear about the impact of EI in online classes and understands that it plays a critical role in the success of the teacher.

In the Czech context, it is visible that the teachers knew about the importance of EI in any teaching process but before the research, they had not realized it. The interview enabled them to think about EI and its presence or lack of presence in their teaching practices, and they considered the research as a helpful undertaking for them to become aware of the EI and its impact on the teaching process. Many of the participants expressed EI in their statements. For instance, they stated that *I have not realized the importance of EI in my classes but now I must*

admit I somehow acknowledge it and I know that the level of EI is probably crucial for any educational activity and definitely for foreign language learning. Another reaction, very similar, was: *I am aware of EI and that it can have a significant impact on many aspects of teaching and learning but I do not intentionally implement any of the aspects of EI in my teaching. Maybe, after this interview? I will reconsider it and probably try to think about the impact of EI on the classroom. These things are rather neglected and now I realize that they are probably crucial when a person wants to be a good teacher and also popular among students.*

Improving EI is seen as a very important aspect of being a good teacher and all the respondents acknowledged the importance of EI in the teaching process. A very common reaction to the first prompt was also the lack of planned education and training regarding the place of EI in a teaching profession despite the fact that teachers are supposed to be trained for the importance of knowing psychology, teaching methodology, and other related disciplines in the teaching practice. The respondents very often expressed their disappointment with the lack of formal or informal training during their studies, and their knowledge of EI and its impact at the school teaching is more or less intuitive: *I feel that not enough attention is paid to the issue of EI in student teachers' training while they are at the university where there are trained to be future teachers and this questionnaire and interview just reminded me of the importance of EI for the future teachers when they are trained for their future job.*

The second interview prompt was as follows:

2. Do you use any specific intentional strategies to enhance EI in your online classes? If so, specify them, please.

The results of the two samples to the second prompt are presented in Table 4. Teachers' choices were varied and some of them used more than one strategy

Table 4. *The Results Pertaining to Iraqi and Czech Teachers' Responses to the Second Interview Prompt*

Strategies used by teachers	Iraqi (N)	Czech (N)
Practicing self-care	12	13
Becoming curious	10	14
Creating space for all emotions	10	12

Clarifying one's intention for the day	15	16
Reading the chat box	16	9
Beginning and ending the session well	5	7

Iraqi teachers' responses showed that a good number of them used the *reading the chatbox* strategy, and they paid attention to students from the beginning of the lecture, and half of them were curious and created spaces for including all emotions. Most of them believed that they were using most of the EI strategies unintentionally in their classes. One of the Iraqi teachers stated that *Well if I want to consider motivating speeches as a strategy, so yes I have always used words to get them. I mean get their feelings. Also, I take a few minutes in every lecture to ask about their concerns and feelings. Emotions do come out with words.* Another Iraqi teacher responded to this question as follows; *Actually, I prefer to use a mixture of more than one strategy, but the most common favorite one is to begin and end classes well to decrease occupational stress.*

In the Czech context, the situation was reported to be very similar to the Iraqi context. The teachers attempted to clearly define their intention, that is, they formulated the trajectory of their progress during the class. They also tried to practice self-care as they realized its importance so as not to become burned out at the very early stage of their career. They also acknowledged the importance of emotions in the teaching process and realized that it is crucial to create sufficient spaces for emotions in the teaching process. One of the responses was: *I know that it is crucial to formulate clear aims for the course and also every class session so that it is clear where we are moving toward and what the potential and desirable outcomes should be at the end. However, it is rather difficult for me to systematically incorporate any kind of self-care to improve my and my students´ well-being. I am also aware that emotions are very important in any teaching and learning but I am not sure whether I am good at using emotions efficiently.*

The third interview prompt was as follow:

3. Do you think that there could be significant differences in an online L2 context in individuals with low and high EI? What impact could it have on online EFL classes in your opinion?

Most teachers in the Iraqi context, with a percentage of 80%, agreed on the existence of differences between students with high and low EI in an online L2 learning context. To deal with classes in an online format, the students need to be confident, stable, and risk-taking, as

the teachers mentioned and these were the main features that the teachers depended on to diagnose students' EI. The teachers clarified that there is a huge difference between online EFL classes and traditional classes as the first put a heavy burden on the part of the students and makes them anxious and stressed. Thus, working on students' EI is an essential matter. One of the Iraqi teachers who agreed with this point stated that *Of course, learners with high EI will have the cognitive, metacognitive and ability to manage the resources. Meanwhile, low EI learners lacked these strategies, but we can improve their low EI levels because I think that EI can be learned and strengthened.* Two Iraqi teachers did not agree with this point by stating that *out of my experience, no, I did not feel that sort of difference.*

The Czech teachers stated that the differences in EI can have some potential impacts on the quality of education and that there could be even conflicts when there are two or more persons with different levels of EI. They also realized that the different levels of EI could have different impacts on the teaching environment when the classes are conducted in-person and online. In online classes, there is not much space for human, personal contact, and many respondents consider this a big drawback to the smooth process of information transfer.

The fourth interview prompt was as follows:

4. Do you try to construct an emotionally-rich teaching environment in your online classes? If so, how? Is it difficult? Do you use any specific strategies to do so?

Most Iraqi teachers (70%) showed their interest to construct an emotionally-rich language learning environment. They tried to apply different types of strategies, some of which were mentioned above, to provide students with a suitable learning environment to encourage them to join the classes, and to increase their learning. Online education represents a challenge not only for teachers but also for students. Thus, working on enhancing its atmosphere is a crucial concern. When asking teachers about the difficulty of constructing an emotionally-rich teaching environment in their online classes, they all replied yes; there is a kind of difficulty but after some attempts, it becomes a habit. One of the Iraqi teachers stated that *I try to create sustainable online spaces as much as possible to motivate my learners, inspire them, capture their attention, and accommodate all…If so, how? By starting the lectures with greeting expressions, asking them about their feelings to see whether they are good or not, and finally, sending them a note to show that I care about them. Is it difficult? yes of course it is at the beginning but gradually it will be easier especially when I prepare some strategies to follow. Do you have any specific strategies to do so? Yes, I hope to reach out and contact families,*

know their big struggles, and try to solve their problems and support them to use these learning platforms.

In the Czech context, many of the respondents expressed their awareness that in online classes it is very difficult to actively increase EI due to the lack of personal contact between the teacher and the students. There is also a lack of proper training on how to use digital media in the educational context. The respondents technically know how to use various online platforms used for teaching, such as MS Teams, but it is very complicated, if not impossible, to use it in a creative way supporting the EI of both the teachers and the students. The majority of the respondents knew that their creativity is dramatically reduced in online classes when compared to face-to-face classes. Many of them also asked for systematic training on how to use technological devices not only technically but also from the viewpoint of the humanistic approach in which the student plays an important role. Concerning the strategies used, the teachers admitted that they used many unintentional strategies in their online classes.

Questionnaire Results

In this section, the participants' responses to the close-ended questionnaire are analyzed and presented. The instrument was a modified questionnaire evaluating the level of EI in the students. The aim of this phase was to investigate teachers' perceptions of their level of EI in online L2 teaching contexts. This part is focused on the teachers' evaluation of these five components (i.e. self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills). Self-awareness measures emotional awareness and how much the individual recognizes one's emotions and feelings. Self-regulation is connected to self-control, that is, how the individual manages disruptive emotions and impulses. Motivation is the level of achievement drive, that is, how the person strives to improve or meet a standard of excellence. Empathy is about sensing others' feelings and perspectives and taking an active interest in their concerns. Social skills are connected to the level of influencing others and the possibilities of communicating efficiently with others by sending clear and convincing messages. The replies of teachers of the two contexts were calculated and arranged separately in the following tables (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. *The Results of the Questionnaire as Responded by the Iraqi Teachers*

Iraq

Items	1 (Underdeveloped)	2 (Needs improvement)	3 (Adequate)	4 (Good)	5 (Excellent)
Self-awareness					
"I always know which emotions my students were feeling and why".	3	2	4	4	7
"Didn't find time for such things in online teaching".	5	4	4	3	4
"I recognize how my students 'feelings affect their performance".	2	5	4	4	5
"My students have a guiding awareness of their values and goals".	3	4	4	4	5
Average	3.25	3.75	4.0	3.75	5.25
Self-regulation					
"My students manage their impulsive feelings and distressing emotions well".	4	4	6	3	3
"My students stay composed, positive, and unflappable even in trying moments".	7	4	3	3	3
"My students think clearly and stay focused under pressure".	3	2	7	4	4
Average	4.6	3.3	5.3	3.3	3.3
Motivation					
"My students are results-oriented, with a high drive to meet objectives and standards".	4	4	6	4	2
"My students set challenging goals and take calculated risks".	5	4	5	4	2
"My students pursue information to reduce	4	3	6	4	3

uncertainty and find ways to do better".					
"My students continuously learn in order to improve my performance".	2	3	6	4	5
Average	3.75	3.5	5.75	4.0	3.0
Empathy					
"My students are attentive to emotional cues and are good listeners".	2	2	4	5	7
"My students show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives".	3	3	4	5	5
"My students help out based on understanding other people's needs and feelings".	4	4	4	4	4
Average	3.3	3.0	4.0	4.6	5.3
Social Skills					
"My students are skilled at the art of persuasion".	4	4	4	4	4
"My students make sure they fine-tune their presentations to appeal to the listener".	4	3	3	4	6
"My students are able to use complex strategies like indirect influence to build consensus and support".	5	4	4	3	3
"My students can orchestrate dramatic events to effectively make a point".	4	5	3	4	3
Average	4.25	4.0	3.5	3.75	4.0

As can be seen in Table 5, the data analysis revealed that in the Iraqi setting, self-regulation and motivation were the least common, whereas empathy and self-awareness were the most commonly mentioned qualities among EFL Iraqi teachers in online programs.

Table 6. *The Results of the Questionnaire as Responded by the Czech Teachers*

Czech Republic

Items	1 (Underdeveloped)	2 (Needs improvement)	3 (Adequate)	4 (Good)	5 (Excellent)
Self-awareness					
"I always know which emotions my students were feeling and why".	1	5	6	5	3
"I didn't find time for such things in online teaching".	0	7	7	6	0
"I recognize how my students 'feelings affect their performance".	1	8	8	2	1
"My students have a guiding awareness of their values and goals".	3	9	4	4	0
Average	1.7	7.25	6.25	4.25	2
Self-regulation					
"My students manage their impulsive feelings and distressing emotions well".	0	1	2	8	9
"My students stay composed, positive, and unflappable even in trying moments".	0	3	4	8	5
"My students think clearly and stay focused under pressure".	0	1	8	6	5
Average	0	1.7	4.7	8	6.3
Motivation					
"My students are results-oriented, with a high drive to meet objectives and standards".	3	4	6	3	3

"My students set challenging goals and take calculated risks".	2	3	6	5	4
"My students pursue information to reduce uncertainty and find ways to do better".	2	3	7	5	3
"My students continuously learn in order to improve my performance".	2	3	8	4	3
Average	2.25	3.25	6.75	4.25	3.25

<div align="center">Empathy</div>

"My students are attentive to emotional cues and are good listeners".	1	2	9	6	2
"My students show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives".	1	4	5	6	4
"My students help out based on understanding other people's needs and feelings".	2	5	5	5	3
Average	1.3	3.7	6.3	5.7	3

<div align="center">Social Skills</div>

"My students are skilled at the art of persuasion".	7	5	3	3	2
"My students make sure they fine-tune their presentations to appeal to the listener".	0	5	6	7	2
"My students are able to use complex strategies like indirect influence to	1	5	5	6	2

build consensus and support".					
"My students can orchestrate dramatic events to effectively make a point".	0	7	6	4	3
Average	4	5.5	5	5	2.25

Czech teachers, on the other hand, had low self-awareness and social characteristics frequencies. According to the findings, there is a distinction between Czech teachers who scored higher on self-regulation and empathy qualities as indicated in Table 6 above.

Table 7. *Iraqi Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
q1	20	3.5000	1.46898	-.553	.512	-1.007	.992
q2	20	2.8500	1.49649	.178	.512	-1.359	.992
q3	20	3.2500	1.37171	-.093	.512	-1.261	.992
q4	20	3.2000	1.43637	-.152	.512	-1.287	.992
q5	20	2.8500	1.34849	.158	.512	-.955	.992
q6	20	2.5500	1.50350	.461	.512	-1.246	.992
q7	20	3.2000	1.32188	-.255	.512	-.746	.992
q8	20	2.8000	1.28145	.080	.512	-.893	.992
q9	20	2.7000	1.34164	.177	.512	-1.083	.992
q10	20	3.0500	1.39454	-.227	.512	-1.198	.992
q11	20	3.3500	1.30888	-.262	.512	-.861	.992
q12	20	3.6500	1.34849	-.712	.512	-.535	.992
q13	20	3.3000	1.41793	-.347	.512	-1.117	.992
q14	20	3.0000	1.45095	.000	.512	-1.323	.992
q15	20	3.0000	1.45095	.000	.512	-1.323	.992
q16	20	3.2500	1.55174	-.276	.512	-1.454	.992
q17	20	2.8000	1.43637	.152	.512	-1.287	.992
q18	20	2.9500	1.46808	.095	.512	-1.402	.992

Table 7 shows the mean and the standard deviation of each item in the Iraqi context separately. It is clear that item number 12 which reads "My students are attentive to emotional cues and are good listeners" and item number 1 "I always know which emotions my students

were feeling and why" have gained the highest mean scores 3.650 and 3.500, respectively. The first is related to empathy and the second is related to self-awareness.

Discussion

The results of the study showed that there were many differences in applying EI in the two contexts under investigation, namely Online L2 teaching in Iraq and the Czech Republic. While most of the Iraqi teachers (75% of the sample) considered EI an essential part of the online teaching process and class management, the Czech teachers (70% of the sample) did not pay much attention to it as separate psychological merit in the class. This result showed that Iraqi teachers are much more familiar with the term EI and its use than Czech teachers, and they applied EI intentionally or unintentionally in their online classes. This result is supported by the recent research done in the same context and proved that approximately, all humanistic learning elements were available in this context (Al-Obaydi, 2021). Czech college teachers, on the other hand, may need more training courses and workshops on EI to put their feet on the right corner to give priority to managing emotions in their online classes. This situation can be caused by many factors that are, however, difficult to identify from the research results obtained in this study. The two samples shared the same viewpoints concerning whether EI could improve the class atmosphere; they both shared a high percentage of 75% for Iraq and 85% for Czech teachers in agreeing on the essential role of EI in improving the online class environment by for instance stating that "*It helps in changing the mood of students, decreasing their anxiety, helping for having more interactions and communication, and increasing the rapport between the teacher and students*". Despite the fact that the Czech teachers did not use EI intentionally, they were at least aware of its importance and relevance in any education process, even the online ones.

Another result of the present study was related to the strategies used by teachers in their online classes, which showed that teachers' choices were varied in the two contexts. The strategies that gained higher scores by the Iraqi teachers were "read the chatbox" and "clarify your intention for the day". The Czech college teachers' choices were not much different from the Iraqi teachers' responses as they chose "clarify your intention for the day" and "getting curious". This point showed that the two samples used many EI strategies unintentionally but on a very similar level and scope. They used them as part of their daily routine, but they did not know this is what is called EI specifically with the Czech sample which actually realized the impact of EI during the interviews. Obviously, there is not much training on EI during the

university preparation of the student teachers, and they use EI more or less intuitively. This situation should be changed in favor of the more intentional implementation of EI into the university curricula for student teachers as the interactions between teachers and students using EI strategies leads to creating an ideal teaching environment that helps students experience different feelings, emotions, and senses (Miri & Pishghadam, 2021).

As far as the third research question is concerned, both samples agreed on the existence of differences in EI among learners, and these divergences directly affected the educational atmosphere in their context. Most of the Iraqi teachers mentioned the main personality qualities that they depended on for determining the difference between students with low and high EI levels. Working in this way, the teachers confirmed that they were really clever and had the ability to manage their online classes professionally. The Czech teachers, on the other hand, admitted that many individual differences might arise when the class includes students with a mixture of both low and high EI levels. The main problem according to them was that there is not much space for human, personal contact with students. The two samples agreed on the sharp difference between traditional face-to-face teaching classes and the online ones, and they also realized the importance of EI in online classes even if it was not very evident at the beginning for them. In this way, computer anxiety and emotional intelligence are very clear here which is in agreement with Rahardjo, Juneman, and Setiani (2013) and Jan, Anwar, and Warraich (2017). This difference absolutely can lead to building teacher awareness towards making an emotionally-rich English language teaching environment and to leave "contextualization and move toward emotionalization" as suggested by Pishghadam, Adamson, and Shayesteh (2013, p. 11). In online teaching, it is much more complicated to implement EI due to the personal distance and the digital medium which presents a significant constraint or a bottleneck where the information transfer is much more complicated than in real-life communication. Moreover, any EI implementation through digital media will have a much more complicated position as EI per se needs closer personal contact which is rather difficult to achieve through digital media.

In response to the last prompt of the interview, the teachers in the two contexts agreed on the existence of many difficulties to construct an emotionally-rich online teaching environment due to many reasons such as the lack of personal contact in online education in addition to the lack of humanistic training to deal humanely with students, and learners' attitude (Kumar, Muniandy, & Yahaya, 2012). While the Iraqi teachers showed their interest to begin by making some small steps and then developing their efforts gradually, the Czech teachers

asked for more systematic training on EI. The Czech teachers were well aware of the importance of any kind of systematic training much more than the Iraqi teachers, and this could be caused by the lack of such training during the university education for the Czech teachers. Both groups showed a high degree of responsibility to apply EI in their online classes and to deal with students humanely, in line with what other researchers have found which has significant effects on students' achievement (Jajarmi, 2019) and motivation (Makiabadi, 2020). As both samples mentioned that online education represented a challenge to deal with students' emotions (Kumar et al., 2012), the Iraqi teachers demonstrated that they actually used EI strategies such as communicating with students' families and trying to solve their personal problems. On the other hand, the Czech teachers clarified that they sometimes used EI strategies unintentionally. The Iraqi culture is more collectivistic, and therefore, even families of the students are involved in the teacher-student interactions; however, in the Czech context, this situation is not visible as the culture of the country is rather individualistic, and families are not involved, or very rarely involved in teacher-student interactions.

Moreover, the results of the last interview prompt from the two contexts showed that though Iraq and the Czech Republic are cross-culturally different, their teachers seem to be similarly motivated and stimulated to apply the aspects of EI in their online classes. Both samples agreed on the existence of many difficulties in online English language classes in comparison with the traditional face-to-face teaching classes, but they were willing to find possible solutions in this regard. Most teachers in the two contexts admitted using many EI strategies in their classes (specifically in Iraq) whether intentionally or unintentionally. Though this study may ignore many sides in relation to inserting emotionally-rich online English language classes, it shed light on the essential role of teachers as evolvers who are responsible for cultivating and creating a safe learning environment that is supposed to increase students' emotional orientation (Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, & Tabatabaiean, 2019). On the other hand, the results showed that the teachers of both contexts needed more systematic training on the psychological aspects of online teaching to be knowledgeable enough and to work more on humanistic elements in online teaching. A viewpoint that was recommended by Al-Obaydi (2021, p. 11) was that "what English language teachers need is not only scientific knowledge of the content or technology but also the knowledge of humanistic learning in all its aspects to deal with learners morally and to pay more attention to ethical considerations in class".

The final part of the results was related to the data obtained through the close-ended questionnaire based on Goleman's (1998) EI model. This EI model focuses on defining EI by

examining a wide range of abilities and competencies that influence students' emotional performance. As a result, the Mixed Model is frequently used to diagnose and evaluate students' abilities in corporate or educational settings. This part was focused on the evaluation of five traits, i.e. self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The analysis of data showed that self-regulation and motivation gained the fewest frequency in the Iraqi context. Czech students, on the other hand, got few frequencies for self-awareness and social traits. The results further showed that empathy and self-awareness were the most frequently referred to skills among EFL Iraqi students in online classes. A distinction is made with Czech students who got higher scores in self-regulation and empathy traits. Thus, teachers can consider this result a good indicator to work on in order to improve the online teaching environment. The merit of choosing Goleman's model specifically is because all the traits used in it are learned and are not inborn talents. They have acquired qualities that may be learned and cultivated to attain exceptional results in several areas of life which, can give chance to teachers to work on the weak points of their teaching practice. It is worth mentioning that previous studies have proved that there is a positive role of trait EI in the EFL college students' writing (Pishghadam, 2009b; Shao, Yu, & Ji, 2013), reading (Abdolrezapour & Tavakoli, 2012), listening (Badakhshan, 2012), speaking (Bora, 2012), and reflective thinking (Afshar & Rahimi, 2016). But no study has been found to deal with the analysis of EFL online classes using Goleman's trait model. Thus, this study tried to bridge the gap in the literature of EI implemented in L2 learning in higher education institutions of Iraq and the Czech Republic.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

This research clearly shows that EI plays a crucial role in the educational process even if it is conducted online. The findings indicate that it very much depends on the previous training if the teachers are to be aware of the importance of EI. The relatively significant differences between the teachers from Iraq and the Czech Republic can be caused by different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, their educational systems vary as well; therefore, it is not surprising that the research results yielded very different findings. The recommendations could be to implement a systematic and intentional approach to developing EI in teachers at all levels from the beginning of their professional education at university. The focus could be on their personal development, including the emotional and cognitive aspects. Thes present research results show that the gap in the teachers' EI could be removed by a systematic approach of training leading to their better EI competence. This would not be beneficial only for the teachers but

also, and even much more, for their students. FLL is a specific area of education that has recently gained priority due to the globalized world, multinational corporations, and cross-cultural teams. Therefore, any kind of improvement of FLL at any level, starting from basic schools through high schools and ending at a university level, will prove useful and will bring many benefits related to improved satisfaction of both the teachers and the students.

The present study only focused on EI and no other factor was considered in relation to it. Thus, future research students can examine the relation of EI with L2 acquisition or other academic factors and further look for potential correlations between the level of EI and the outcomes of FLL. In this study, due to accessibility constraints, data were collected from only two contexts. Future studies can collect data on EI from other cultures. Future studies can also look for the mechanisms responsible for L2 acquisition in connection to EI. The present study only used questionnaires and interviews for collecting data and collected data at a one-time interval from the participants. Future studies can do a case study of single cases or can do longitudinal studies on teachers regarding their EI level. Overall, the study of teachers' EI in online L2 teaching is a new and promising line of research that can be more investigated by future L2 researchers around the world.

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Appendix

Interview Prompts

1. What does EI in online EFL classes mean to you? How do you think it could improve the class atmosphere?

2. Do you use any specific intentional strategies to enhance EI in your online classes? If so, specify them, please.

3. Do you think that there could be significant differences in an online foreign language context in individuals with low and high EI? What impact could it have on online EFL classes in your opinion?

4. Do you try to construct an emotionally-based teaching environment in your online classes? If so, how? Is it difficult? Do you use any specific strategies to do so?