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Hope in the Virtual Classroom: Agency, Pathways, and Classroom-Management Efficacy Among Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Online EFL teaching requires teachers to sustain instructional structure, learner engagement, and productive interaction despite technological disruption and reduced access to behavioral cues. Although teacher psychological resources have received increasing attention in language education, the role of hope, particularly agency and pathways, in online classroom-management efficacy remains insufficiently understood. This study examined associations between teacher hope and online classroom-management efficacy among 150 Iranian EFL teachers in private language institutes in Shiraz, Iran, using a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design. Data were collected using the Adult Hope Scale and a 26-item classroom-management efficacy scale assessing time management, behavior monitoring, and engagement strategies. Pearson correlations showed a significant positive association between overall hope and classroom-management efficacy, $r = .481$, 95% CI [.35, .60], $p < .001$, corresponding to 23.1% shared variance. Both agency ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) and pathways ($r = .41$, $p < .001$) were positively associated with classroom-management efficacy, with agency showing the larger association. The overall hope-efficacy association remained significant after controlling for teaching experience and educational degree ($r = .452$, $p < .001$). These findings extend Snyder's Hope Theory to online EFL teaching by linking a goal-directed psychological resource to teachers' professional functioning, and provide evidence from an underexamined Iranian EFL setting. Teacher-development initiatives may benefit from integrating goal-oriented reflection, alternative-pathway planning, and online classroom-management preparation, though such resources should complement rather than substitute for institutional and technological support. Longitudinal, multi-source, and intervention-based research is needed to clarify the temporal and causal processes underlying these associations.

1 Introduction

The rapid expansion of online education has fundamentally reshaped the conditions under which language teaching takes place. Although the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the large-scale transition from face-to-face instruction to virtual learning, the challenges exposed during this period have continued to shape contemporary digital education (Daniel, 2020; United Nations, 2020). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, these challenges are particularly consequential because effective teaching depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on teachers' capacity to sustain interaction, regulate classroom processes, respond to disruption, and maintain student engagement. Online platforms can facilitate interaction, feedback, and assessment; however, technology alone does not ensure effective instruction. Rather, the quality of online teaching is also shaped by teachers' pedagogical adaptability and psychological resources (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Khafaga, 2021; Rahayu, 2018). Consequently, understanding the teacher-related factors that support effective classroom management in virtual EFL environments remains an important research priority.

Online classroom management differs in important respects from management in face-to-face classrooms. Teachers working in virtual environments must maintain instructional structure while dealing with reduced access to nonverbal cues, technological interruptions, variable student

participation, and challenges related to monitoring behavior and engagement (Almansour & Alahdal, 2020; Khalawi & Halabi, 2020). These demands place substantial cognitive and affective requirements on teachers. Existing research has documented technological, institutional, and pedagogical barriers to effective online teaching, but comparatively less attention has been given to the psychological resources that may help teachers respond constructively to such demands (Al-Qahtani, 2019; Hakim, 2020). This omission is theoretically important because classroom management is not solely a matter of externally imposed rules or technical competence; it also involves teachers' capacity to remain goal-directed, adaptive, and persistent when instructional conditions become uncertain or difficult.

One psychological construct that may be particularly relevant in this regard is hope. Within Snyder's (2002) hope theory, hope is conceptualized as a goal-directed cognitive-motivational process comprising two related components: agency, or the perceived capacity and motivation to pursue desired goals, and pathways, or the perceived ability to generate routes for achieving those goals. This conceptualization makes hope potentially relevant to the demands of online teaching, where teachers may need both persistence in pursuing instructional goals and flexibility in identifying alternative responses to unexpected classroom problems. Research has associated hope with positive educational and psychological outcomes, including academic achievement, self-efficacy, and well-being (Alarcon et al., 2013; Feldman & Kubota, 2015). In EFL contexts, emerging scholarship has also highlighted the relevance of teachers' positive psychological resources to their professional functioning and adaptation. Nevertheless, the role of teacher hope in the specific domain of online classroom management remains insufficiently understood.

This gap is particularly salient in EFL settings outside Western, high-resource educational systems. Much of the literature on online teaching has emphasized technological access, institutional constraints, or broad pedagogical challenges, while comparatively limited empirical attention has been directed toward how teachers' psychological resources relate to their ability to manage virtual classrooms effectively. The issue may be especially important in contexts such as Iran, where EFL teachers may work under infrastructural and professional constraints while simultaneously being expected to maintain engagement and instructional continuity in online environments (Ghadyani et al., 2020; Hakim, 2020). Although previous research has examined Iranian teachers' professional characteristics and classroom-management efficacy, the potential contribution of hope—and, more specifically, its agency and pathways dimensions—to online classroom-management efficacy has not been sufficiently examined. Addressing this gap can extend research at the intersection of positive psychology, teacher psychology, and digital EFL pedagogy.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the relationship between teacher hope and classroom-management efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers engaged in online instruction. Drawing on Snyder's (2002) hope theory, the study examines both overall hope and its two constituent dimensions, agency and pathways, in relation to teachers' perceived ability to manage time, monitor behavior, and sustain learner engagement in virtual classes. By distinguishing between the two dimensions of hope rather than treating hope solely as a global construct, the study examines whether agency and pathways are each

associated with online classroom-management efficacy. The study therefore contributes contextual evidence from an underexamined EFL setting while also extending the application of hope theory to a specific dimension of teachers' professional practice.

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' overall hope and their online classroom-management efficacy?

RQ2. What are the relationships between teachers' agency and pathways thinking and their online classroom-management efficacy?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to a more psychologically informed understanding of online EFL teaching and to identify teacher-level psychological resources that may be relevant to effective management of virtual instructional environments.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Online Classroom Management in EFL Teaching

The expansion of digitally mediated language education has altered the conditions under which teachers organize instruction, regulate interaction, and sustain learner engagement. Although online and face-to-face classrooms share fundamental pedagogical goals, the virtual environment changes the mechanisms through which teachers establish structure and respond to emerging instructional and behavioral demands. In particular, reduced access to nonverbal cues, variable patterns of student participation, technological interruptions, and difficulties in monitoring learner behavior can complicate the maintenance of coherent and engaging instructional routines (Almansour & Alahdal, 2020; Coman et al., 2020; Gold & Holodynski, 2017). These challenges suggest that effective online classroom management cannot be understood solely in terms of teachers' technical competence or the availability of digital platforms. Rather, it involves the capacity to coordinate instructional processes, respond adaptively to disruption, and sustain productive teacher–student interaction under conditions of uncertainty. Research on classroom management has traditionally emphasized observable practices such as establishing routines, clarifying expectations, monitoring behavior, organizing instructional time, and maintaining student engagement. These dimensions remain relevant in online EFL classrooms, but their enactment can become more demanding when teachers have limited control over students' physical environments and reduced access to immediate behavioral cues.

In virtual settings, therefore, management may depend not only on what teachers do but also on the psychological resources they draw upon when routines are disrupted or when conventional management strategies become less effective. Recent scholarship on teacher agency similarly suggests that teachers' capacity to act adaptively is shaped by how they interpret situations, mobilize resources, and make context-sensitive decisions in response to educational demands. This perspective is particularly

relevant to EFL teaching. Language learning is inherently interactional, and effective instruction requires teachers to sustain participation, provide timely feedback, manage communicative activities, and maintain a classroom climate conducive to risk-taking and engagement. In online environments, these responsibilities may be intensified by technological instability, fragmented participation, and reduced social presence. Research on Iranian English language teachers, for example, has shown that online teaching can generate tensions surrounding student engagement, material coverage, and assessment, thereby increasing the emotional and professional demands placed on teachers (Nazari et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings point to the importance of examining not only external conditions of online instruction but also the internal psychological resources that may be associated with teachers' capacity to manage those conditions.

2.1.1 Teacher Hope and Snyder's Hope Theory

Among the psychological resources that may be relevant to teachers' functioning, hope offers a theoretically distinctive framework because it conceptualizes positive functioning in terms of goal-directed cognition and motivation. Snyder's Hope Theory defines hope as a cognitive-motivational state involving two interrelated components: agency, referring to the motivational energy and perceived determination to pursue goals, and pathways, referring to the perceived capacity to generate alternative routes toward those goals (Snyder, 2002). These components operate interactively rather than independently: individuals need both motivation to pursue valued goals and perceived routes through which those goals can be attained.

This distinction is particularly relevant to teaching in complex and uncertain environments. Teachers routinely encounter situations in which instructional goals remain stable while the routes for achieving them must be adjusted. In a virtual classroom, for example, a teacher may encounter technical disruption, uneven participation, or a sudden decline in student engagement and may need to persist toward an instructional goal while simultaneously identifying alternative ways of accomplishing it. From a Hope Theory perspective, agency may be relevant to sustained effort and goal pursuit, whereas pathways thinking may be particularly relevant to flexible problem solving and the generation of alternative instructional responses. Importantly, this theoretical interpretation concerns plausible mechanisms rather than established causal effects in online EFL classrooms.

The educational literature has linked hope to a range of adaptive psychological and behavioral outcomes. Meta-analytic evidence has associated hope and optimism with positive functioning, while educational research has connected hope with academic achievement and self-efficacy (Alarcon et al., 2013; Feldman & Kubota, 2015). More recent work has continued to employ Hope Theory to explain how goal-directed thinking may operate in educational and professional contexts, including teachers' responses to stress and professional challenges (see, e.g., contemporary applications of Hope Theory to teachers). These findings support the relevance of hope as a teacher-level psychological resource, but they do not by themselves establish that hope is related to classroom-management efficacy. That relationship requires direct empirical investigation.

2.2 Psychological Resources, Teacher Functioning, and Online EFL Contexts

Research in language teacher psychology increasingly recognizes that teachers' psychological characteristics are closely connected to professional functioning, classroom interaction, and pedagogical decision-making. In EFL research, constructs such as teacher emotions, emotion regulation, self-efficacy, resilience, and well-being have received increasing attention. A recent systematic review of teacher emotion regulation and well-being in EFL contexts, for example, concluded that adaptive emotional functioning is consistently associated with teacher resilience, instructional effectiveness, supportive classroom climates, and student engagement, while also emphasizing the need for more longitudinal and culturally contextualized research.

This broader literature provides an important conceptual basis for examining hope, but it also highlights the need to distinguish hope from related constructs. Hope is not synonymous with general positive affect, optimism, resilience, or self-efficacy. Its defining feature is the combination of agency and pathways within goal pursuit. Consequently, examining hope may add explanatory specificity to research on teacher psychological resources by identifying not simply whether teachers possess positive psychological characteristics, but whether their capacity to remain goal-directed and generate alternative routes is associated with particular forms of professional functioning.

The relevance of this perspective becomes stronger in online EFL environments, where teachers may need to maintain instructional goals while adapting to rapidly changing conditions. Research with Iranian EFL teachers has documented the emotional complexity of online teaching and the tensions associated with maintaining student engagement and meeting instructional expectations in virtual settings (Nazari et al., 2024). More broadly, recent scholarship on teacher agency conceptualizes teachers' adaptive action as situated within social, organizational, and pedagogical contexts and links agency with problem-solving, professional action, and well-being. These perspectives suggest that teachers' psychological resources may be especially consequential when instructional environments require persistence, adaptation, and context-sensitive responses.

However, the existing literature remains fragmented. Research on online language teaching frequently emphasizes technological barriers, instructional design, learner engagement, or teachers' emotional experiences, whereas classroom-management research has more often focused on observable practices and teacher efficacy. At the same time, research on hope has generally examined broader outcomes such as well-being, achievement, motivation, or coping rather than the specific domain of online classroom management. The conceptual intersection between these strands therefore remains insufficiently developed.

2.3 Teacher Hope and Classroom-Management Efficacy

Theoretically, there are several reasons to expect an association between teacher hope and classroom-management efficacy. First, classroom management is goal-directed: teachers seek to establish orderly

instructional routines, sustain learner engagement, allocate time effectively, and respond to behavioral difficulties while maintaining broader instructional objectives. Agency thinking may support persistence toward these goals when teachers encounter setbacks. Second, online classroom management often requires teachers to modify their strategies when initial responses are ineffective. Pathways thinking may therefore be relevant to teachers' perceived capacity to identify alternative responses to technological, behavioral, or engagement-related problems. Third, both agency and pathways are conceptually compatible with adaptive professional action because they concern how individuals pursue goals under challenging conditions.

Nevertheless, the empirical evidence directly connecting teacher hope to classroom-management efficacy in online EFL settings remains limited. Existing research has provided indirect support by linking positive psychological resources with teacher functioning, resilience, emotional regulation, and engagement, and by documenting the particular demands of online language teaching. Yet these studies do not adequately answer whether teachers who report higher levels of hope also report stronger classroom-management efficacy, nor do they clarify whether agency and pathways are similarly related to management outcomes.

The distinction between agency and pathways is especially important. Treating hope as a single global score may obscure potentially different relationships between its motivational and strategic components and teachers' professional practices. Agency concerns the motivational determination to pursue goals, whereas pathways concerns the perceived availability of routes for reaching them. In the context of online classroom management, these components may therefore have different functional relevance. A teacher may possess multiple possible strategies but lack sufficient motivational persistence to implement them consistently; conversely, a highly persistent teacher may remain committed to instructional goals while having difficulty generating alternative routes when established strategies fail. Examining the two components separately can therefore provide a more theoretically informative account than relying exclusively on total hope. This issue also has contextual significance in Iran. Much of the teacher-psychology literature has been developed in educational systems outside the specific institutional and technological conditions experienced by Iranian EFL teachers. Existing scholarship has documented the complexity of online teaching for Iranian English language teachers, including tensions involving student engagement, instructional delivery, and assessment (Nazari et al., 2024). At the same time, recent work on teacher agency emphasizes that psychological resources and adaptive action are shaped by the contexts in which teachers work rather than operating independently of institutional and sociocultural conditions. These observations support the value of examining teacher hope in a clearly defined Iranian EFL context while avoiding assumptions that findings from other educational settings necessarily generalize to this population.

2.4 Research Gap and Conceptual Rationale

Taken together, the literature reveals four unresolved issues. First, research on online EFL teaching has documented substantial instructional and interactional demands, but comparatively less attention has been given to teacher-level psychological resources that may be associated with the effective

management of those demands. Second, although hope has been linked to adaptive educational and professional outcomes, its relationship with teachers' classroom-management efficacy remains insufficiently examined. Third, the application of Snyder's Hope Theory to online EFL teaching has rarely examined the separate bivariate associations of agency and pathways with teachers' classroom-management efficacy. Fourth, evidence from Iranian EFL settings remains limited, particularly regarding the intersection of teacher psychology and online classroom management.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining teacher hope as a multidimensional psychological resource in relation to online classroom-management efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers. Rather than assuming a causal effect, the study investigates whether overall hope, agency, and pathways are systematically associated with teachers' perceived capacity to manage time, monitor behavior, and sustain learner engagement in virtual classes. This approach allows the study to extend both the teacher-psychology literature and research on digital EFL pedagogy by connecting a theoretically defined positive-psychological construct with a specific domain of professional teaching practice.

Based on Snyder's (2002) Hope Theory and the preceding empirical and conceptual literature, the study advances the following hypotheses:

H1. Teacher hope is positively associated with online classroom-management efficacy.

H2. Agency thinking is positively associated with online classroom-management efficacy.

H3. Pathways thinking is positively associated with online classroom-management efficacy.

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine the associations between teacher hope and online classroom-management efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers. A correlational design was appropriate because the primary purpose was to determine whether teachers' levels of overall hope, agency thinking, and pathways thinking were systematically related to their perceived capacity to manage online classroom processes. The study was non-experimental; therefore, the findings are interpreted as associations rather than as evidence of causal effects. The study was guided by Snyder's Hope Theory, which conceptualizes hope as a goal-directed cognitive-motivational construct comprising agency and pathways thinking. Consistent with this framework, the analysis distinguished between overall hope and its two constituent dimensions to examine whether they were similarly or differentially associated with online classroom-management efficacy.

3.2 Participants and Context

The participants were 150 Iranian EFL teachers recruited from private language institutes in Shiraz, Iran, using purposive sampling. The sample comprised 100 female and 50 male teachers. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 45 years (M = 32.4, SD = 5.2), and their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 20 years (M = 8.7, SD = 4.1). In terms of educational attainment, 45% held a bachelor's degree, 48% held a master's degree, and 7% held a doctoral degree.

Eligibility criteria required participants to have at least two years of online teaching experience and to use WhatsApp as an instructional platform. These criteria were adopted to ensure that participants had sustained experience with online EFL teaching and were sufficiently familiar with the instructional and classroom-management demands examined in the study.

The purposive sampling strategy was selected to access teachers with direct experience of the target instructional context. Because the sample was drawn from private language institutes in a single city, however, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific evidence rather than as nationally representative estimates of Iranian EFL teachers.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Classroom-Management Efficacy Scale

Teachers' perceived classroom-management efficacy was assessed using a 26-item scale adapted from Yaşar (2008). The scale was translated into Persian and back-translated into English by two bilingual applied-linguistics researchers to ensure conceptual equivalence. Because no previously published psychometric validation of the Persian version for online EFL teaching was available, the present study relied on internal-consistency evidence obtained from the current sample. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). For the purposes of the present study, the scale represented three dimensions of classroom-management efficacy: time management, behavior monitoring, and engagement strategies.

Internal consistency was examined in the present sample. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .82 for time management, .79 for behavior monitoring, and .85 for engagement strategies, with an overall alpha of .87 (95% CI [.84, .90]). Because the scale was originally developed for classroom-management research and was adapted in the present study for online EFL teaching, its measurement properties should be interpreted cautiously. In particular, the present study did not conduct a confirmatory factor analysis of the hypothesized three-factor structure. This issue is acknowledged as a limitation, and future research should further examine the factorial and construct validity of the adapted measure in larger samples and across different instructional contexts.

3.3.2 Adult Hope Scale

Teacher hope was measured using the Adult Hope Scale developed within Snyder's Hope Theory (Snyder et al., 1991). The instrument consists of 12 items, including items assessing two theoretically distinct dimensions, namely agency thinking and pathways thinking, together with filler items. Responses are

recorded on an eight-point scale ranging from 1 (Definitely False) to 8 (Definitely True). A Persian validation of the measure was previously reported by Shegefti and Saman (2011). The Persian version used in the present study was administered to Iranian EFL teachers. Because the present study focused on the current teacher sample, internal consistency was evaluated directly using the data collected in this study. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .83 (95% CI [.79, .86]). In addition to total hope, agency and pathways scores were examined separately to preserve the multidimensional structure of Hope Theory. Although the Adult Hope Scale has an established theoretical and psychometric foundation, the present study did not conduct a confirmatory factor analysis of its two-factor structure in the current teacher sample. Because no confirmatory factor analysis was conducted in the present sample, the current study does not provide sample-specific confirmation of the hypothesized measurement structure. Accordingly, the factorial validity of the measure in this specific population should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

3.4 Procedure

Participants were recruited through institutional WhatsApp groups using purposive sampling.

Before accessing the questionnaire, participants reviewed an online information sheet and informed-consent form. Participation was voluntary, and participants completed the survey electronically through Google Forms during a two-week data-collection period. Attention-check items were embedded in the questionnaire to identify potentially inattentive responses, and IP-address restrictions were used to reduce the possibility of duplicate submissions. No identifying information was requested as part of the survey procedure. The data were used exclusively for research purposes and were handled in accordance with the applicable institutional ethical requirements.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in several stages. First, the dataset was screened for incomplete or duplicate responses and for responses failing the embedded attention checks. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, observed ranges, skewness, and kurtosis, were then calculated for all study variables. Second, the internal consistency of the two instruments was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Because confirmatory factor analysis was not conducted in the present study, factorial validity was interpreted cautiously and treated as an area for further investigation. Third, zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the associations between overall hope, agency, pathways, and online classroom-management efficacy. Correlation coefficients were reported together with 95% confidence intervals and exact *p*-values. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$. Fourth, partial Pearson correlations were calculated to examine whether the association between overall hope and online classroom-management efficacy remained after controlling for teaching experience and educational attainment. These analyses were treated as robustness analyses rather than as evidence of causal effects. Because the study was designed to examine bivariate associations among overall hope, agency, pathways, and classroom-management efficacy, no multivariable regression model was estimated. Accordingly, the observed differences between the bivariate correlations for

agency and pathways were not interpreted as evidence of statistically different or unique associations. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 28. Effect sizes and confidence intervals were emphasized alongside statistical significance. Because the present study was designed primarily to examine bivariate associations, no multivariable regression model was estimated. Accordingly, the relative unique contributions of agency and pathways were not interpreted from the observed differences between their bivariate correlation coefficients. Any numerical difference between the two correlations was therefore treated as a descriptive pattern rather than as evidence that one component had a statistically stronger association with classroom-management efficacy. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 28. Effect sizes and confidence intervals were emphasized alongside statistical significance.

4 Results

4.1 Data Screening and Preliminary Analysis

The final analytic sample comprised 150 teachers. The dataset was screened for duplicate submissions and inattentive responding using the procedural safeguards implemented during data collection. Distributional characteristics were examined before conducting parametric analyses.

The study variables showed acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis. Classroom-management efficacy had a mean of 80.55 (*SD* = 17.54), with observed scores ranging from 41 to 116. Overall hope had a mean of 48.37 (*SD* = 13.28), with observed scores ranging from 15 to 76. Agency had a mean of 24.91 (*SD* = 7.02), with scores ranging from 6 to 38, whereas pathways had a mean of 23.46 (*SD* = 6.85), with scores ranging from 7 to 40. Skewness and kurtosis values were within the range of − 1.0 to + 1.0 for all variables, indicating no marked departure from approximate univariate normality.

4.2 Measurement Properties

Internal-consistency estimates indicated acceptable-to-good reliability for both instruments in the present sample. For the classroom-management efficacy scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .82 for time management, .79 for behavior monitoring, and .85 for engagement strategies, with an overall alpha of .87 (95% CI [.84, .90]). For the Adult Hope Scale, the overall alpha was .83 (95% CI [.79, .86]). These estimates support the internal consistency of both measures for this sample. Factorial validity of the hypothesized measurement structures was not formally examined via confirmatory factor analysis in the present study; this is addressed as a limitation in Section 4.9.

4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 1. The mean pattern indicated substantial variability across teachers in both overall hope and perceived classroom-management efficacy. Agency and pathways showed relatively similar mean levels, although the two constructs

should not be interpreted as equivalent because they represent theoretically distinct components of hope.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 150)

Study variable	*M*	*SD*	Observed range	Skewness	Kurtosis
Classroom-management efficacy	80.55	17.54	41–116	−0.32	0.87
Total hope	48.37	13.28	15–76	−0.15	0.42
Agency	24.91	7.02	6–38	−0.21	0.38
Pathways	23.46	6.85	7–40	0.04	0.55

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Observed range refers to the minimum and maximum scores obtained in the present sample. Skewness and kurtosis values indicated no substantial evidence of severe univariate distributional non-normality.

4.2.2 Correlational Analysis

Pearson correlation analyses revealed a statistically significant positive association between overall teacher hope and online classroom-management efficacy, r = .481, 95% CI [.35, .60], p < .001. The squared correlation coefficient (r^2 = .231) indicates 23.1% shared variance between the two constructs. This finding suggests that teachers reporting higher levels of hope also tended to report higher levels of classroom-management efficacy in online EFL teaching contexts. When the two dimensions of hope were examined separately, both agency and pathways were positively associated with classroom-management efficacy. Agency showed a correlation of r = .52, p < .001, whereas pathways showed a correlation of r = .41, p < .001. Thus, both dimensions demonstrated meaningful positive bivariate associations with classroom-management efficacy. Although the coefficient for agency was numerically larger, no formal statistical comparison of the two dependent correlations was conducted; therefore, the difference should be interpreted as a descriptive pattern rather than evidence of a statistically stronger association. The difference between the two correlation coefficients should not, however, be interpreted solely on the basis of their numerical magnitudes. A formal statistical comparison would be required to determine whether agency demonstrates a statistically stronger association with classroom-management efficacy than pathways.

4.2.3 Sensitivity Analysis

To examine whether the association between overall hope and classroom-management efficacy remained after accounting for relevant teacher characteristics, a partial correlation was calculated while controlling for teaching experience and educational degree. The association remained statistically significant, r = .452, p < .001. The persistence of the association after adjustment for these two teacher characteristics provides additional evidence that the observed relationship is not fully accounted for by teaching experience or educational degree. Nevertheless, because the present study uses a cross-

sectional, non-experimental design, the partial correlation should be interpreted as an adjusted association rather than as evidence of causal influence or temporal precedence. Together, the zero-order and partial correlations provide convergent evidence of a positive association between teacher hope and online classroom-management efficacy.

4.3 Discussion

The present study examined the association between teacher hope and online classroom-management efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers. The findings showed a statistically significant positive association between overall hope and classroom-management efficacy, with a correlation of $r = .481$ (95% CI [.35, .60], $p < .001$). The squared correlation indicated 23.1% shared variance between the two constructs. Both dimensions of hope were also positively associated with classroom-management efficacy: agency was correlated at $r = .52$ and pathways at $r = .41$, with both associations reaching statistical significance ($p < .001$). Importantly, these findings indicate systematic associations among the constructs rather than causal effects, given the cross-sectional, non-experimental design.

4.4 Interpretation of Teacher Hope and Classroom-Management Efficacy

The observed association between teacher hope and classroom-management efficacy is theoretically consistent with the goal-directed nature of teaching. Classroom management requires teachers to establish instructional goals, maintain routines, monitor classroom processes, respond to disruptions, and sustain student participation. These demands are particularly salient in online environments, where teachers may have reduced access to nonverbal information and may need to adapt their responses to technological interruptions, fluctuating participation, and weakened immediacy of interaction. Such conditions require teachers not only to possess pedagogical knowledge but also to mobilize cognitive-motivational resources while pursuing instructional goals. Snyder's Hope Theory provides a useful framework for interpreting this relationship. Hope is conceptualized not as passive optimism but as a goal-directed cognitive-motivational state involving agency and pathways thinking (Snyder, 2002). Agency represents the motivational determination to pursue goals, whereas pathways refers to the perceived capacity to generate routes through which those goals can be achieved.

This distinction is particularly pertinent to online teaching because teachers may need to maintain instructional objectives while adapting the means through which those objectives are pursued. Thus, teachers who perceive themselves as more capable of sustaining goal-directed effort and identifying alternative routes may also perceive themselves as better able to organize and regulate online classroom processes. The present finding is also consistent with a broader body of educational research linking positive psychological resources with adaptive professional functioning. Existing work has associated hope with self-efficacy, achievement, and other indicators of adaptive functioning (Alarcon et al., 2013; Feldman & Kubota, 2015). More recent research on teacher hope has similarly shown that teachers draw on agency, pathways, and goal-oriented thinking when navigating professional obstacles and adapting their practice. For example, research on teachers during periods of substantial

instructional disruption has identified hope-related processes—including agency and alternative pathways—as part of teachers' efforts to adapt to changing classroom conditions. The present findings extend this literature by connecting teacher hope to a more specific domain of professional functioning: classroom-management efficacy in online EFL teaching. This is an important distinction because a teacher may be psychologically well-adjusted in a general sense without necessarily perceiving greater efficacy in managing instructional interaction, time, and student behavior. The association observed here therefore suggests that hope may be relevant to how teachers perceive their capacity to translate goal-directed psychological resources into the management of complex instructional environments. At the same time, the magnitude of the observed association should be interpreted with appropriate caution. An r of .481 represents a meaningful relationship, but it does not imply that hope is the sole or dominant determinant of classroom-management efficacy. Classroom management is multidetermined and is likely to reflect the interplay of teacher knowledge, experience, institutional conditions, instructional practices, classroom composition, technological affordances, and psychological characteristics. The present study therefore supports the relevance of teacher hope as one potentially important correlate rather than as a comprehensive explanation of effective online classroom management.

4.5 Agency and Pathways

Both agency and pathways showed positive bivariate associations with online classroom-management efficacy. The association for agency (r = .52) was numerically larger than that for pathways (r = .41), suggesting that motivational persistence and perceived strategic flexibility may both be relevant to teachers' perceived capacity to manage online classrooms. However, the present study did not conduct a formal statistical comparison of these two dependent correlations, nor did it estimate the unique contribution of either component while controlling for the other. Accordingly, the larger bivariate coefficient for agency should not be interpreted as evidence that agency is statistically more important than pathways. Rather, the findings indicate that both components of hope are positively related to classroom-management efficacy at the bivariate level. Future studies using multivariable models or structural equation modeling could examine whether agency and pathways demonstrate differential or unique associations after their shared variance and relevant teacher characteristics are taken into account.

4.6 Why the Relationship May Be Particularly Relevant in Online EFL Teaching

The online EFL context provides a plausible environment in which hope-related processes may become especially salient. Language teaching depends heavily on interaction, participation, feedback, and sustained attention. In virtual environments, these processes can be more difficult to regulate because teachers have less direct control over students' physical surroundings and may receive weaker behavioral and nonverbal cues. Online classroom management therefore involves more than maintaining order; it requires maintaining the conditions under which interaction and language learning can occur. From this perspective, hope may be relevant because it provides a framework for maintaining goal orientation under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than implying that hopeful teachers necessarily

manage classrooms more effectively, the present results suggest that teachers who report higher hope also tend to report stronger classroom-management efficacy.

This interpretation is consistent with contemporary work emphasizing that teacher psychological functioning and adaptive professional behavior are situated within challenging instructional environments. Recent systematic evidence in EFL contexts, for example, indicates that teachers' psychological and emotional resources are related to professional functioning, classroom climate, and student engagement, while also highlighting the need for longitudinal and context-sensitive research. The Iranian context provides an additional dimension to this interpretation. The participants in the present study were teachers working in private language institutes in Shiraz who had at least two years of online teaching experience. Their experiences therefore represent a specific institutional and pedagogical context rather than a generic form of online teaching. The association between hope and classroom-management efficacy should consequently be understood as context-sensitive evidence that may be relevant to comparable EFL environments but should not automatically be generalized to all teachers or educational systems. Recent research applying Hope Theory to teacher professional learning similarly suggests that hope is not simply an internal, stable personal attribute; rather, teachers' hope can be shaped by goals, perceived pathways, agency, professional learning experiences, and contextual conditions. This perspective strengthens the interpretation of the current findings as evidence concerning a teacher resource operating within a particular professional context rather than as a universal individual difference that operates independently of context.

4.7 Theoretical Contributions

The study makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends the application of Snyder's Hope Theory into an underexamined domain of teacher professional functioning. Previous educational research has commonly related hope to achievement, well-being, motivation, or other adaptive outcomes (Alarcon et al., 2013; Feldman & Kubota, 2015). By examining classroom-management efficacy, the present study connects hope theory to a concrete dimension of teachers' instructional practice. Second, the study contributes to teacher-psychology research by distinguishing between the two central components of hope. Rather than treating hope exclusively as a global positive psychological characteristic, the study examines agency and pathways separately. This distinction is theoretically useful because the demands of online teaching may simultaneously involve motivational persistence and strategic flexibility. Third, the study adds evidence from an Iranian EFL setting to a literature that has often been developed in other cultural and educational contexts. Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of contextualizing teachers' psychological experiences and avoiding assumptions that models developed in one educational system necessarily operate identically elsewhere. The current findings do not establish cultural uniqueness, but they provide contextually grounded evidence that can contribute to future cross-contextual comparisons.

4.8 Practical Implications

The findings have implications for teacher education and professional development, although these implications should be interpreted as hypotheses for practice rather than as evidence that hope-training programs will necessarily improve classroom management. First, teacher-development programs may benefit from incorporating activities that strengthen teachers' awareness of instructional goals, potential obstacles, and alternative routes toward those goals. This recommendation follows directly from the agency–pathways structure of Hope Theory rather than from a generic emphasis on positive thinking. For example, teachers could be guided to identify recurring online classroom-management problems, formulate several feasible responses, and reflect on which response is most appropriate under specific conditions. Second, professional development could integrate goal-oriented reflection with digital classroom-management training. Rather than treating psychological development and pedagogical competence as separate domains, teacher education programs could ask teachers to connect specific management challenges with concrete action plans and alternative strategies.

This approach would be consistent with recent evidence suggesting that structured professional learning and reflective practices can support teachers' adaptive psychological functioning. Third, the findings suggest that institutional support should remain part of the discussion. Hope should not be conceptualized as a substitute for adequate technological infrastructure, professional autonomy, pedagogical training, or organizational support. A teacher experiencing repeated technical failures or insufficient institutional resources cannot reasonably be expected to compensate for structural problems through psychological resources alone. Consequently, interventions targeting teacher hope should be embedded within broader systems of professional and organizational support.

4.9 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional correlational design prevents conclusions about causal direction. Although higher teacher hope was associated with higher classroom-management efficacy, the data cannot determine whether greater hope contributes to stronger management efficacy, whether successful management experiences foster teachers' hope, or whether reciprocal or third-variable processes account for part of the relationship. Second, both principal constructs were assessed through self-report measures. This creates the possibility of common-method variance and means that the findings concern teachers' perceptions of their classroom-management efficacy rather than directly observed management behavior. Future studies should incorporate multiple sources of evidence, such as classroom observations, student reports, or behavioral indicators of online participation and management.

Third, the purposive sample was restricted to private language institutes in Shiraz. This limits generalizability beyond similar EFL contexts. Replication across public and private institutions, different Iranian regions, and other national settings would help establish the contextual stability of the observed relationships. Fourth, the study focused on teachers with experience of online instruction and WhatsApp-based teaching. Future research should examine whether the relationship between teacher hope and classroom-management efficacy varies across different forms of digital instruction, including synchronous videoconferencing, learning-management systems, blended learning, and fully

asynchronous environments. Fifth, the study examined agency and pathways through separate bivariate correlations and did not formally compare the two dependent correlation coefficients or estimate their unique associations with classroom-management efficacy. Consequently, the finding that the agency correlation was numerically larger than the pathways correlation should not be interpreted as evidence of a statistically stronger relationship. Future research should use multivariable regression or structural equation modeling to examine the relative and unique associations of the two hope dimensions. Finally, longitudinal and intervention-based research is needed to determine whether changes in teacher hope precede changes in classroom-management efficacy. Recent work in teacher psychology has similarly emphasized the need to move beyond the field's substantial reliance on cross-sectional self-report designs and to investigate psychological processes over time. Such research would provide a stronger basis for determining whether hope is an antecedent of professional functioning, a consequence of successful teaching experiences, or part of a reciprocal developmental process.

5 Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence of a positive association between teacher hope and online classroom-management efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers. Overall hope was moderately associated with classroom-management efficacy ($r = .481$, $p < .001$), with 23.1% shared variance between the two measures. Both agency and pathways were also positively associated with classroom-management efficacy, although agency showed a numerically larger bivariate association than pathways. Because the two coefficients were not formally compared and no multivariable model was estimated, this difference should be interpreted as a descriptive pattern rather than evidence that agency has a statistically stronger or unique association with classroom-management efficacy. The findings contribute to the literature by positioning teacher hope as a theoretically grounded psychological resource that may be relevant to a specific domain of online EFL teaching: teachers' perceived capacity to organize instructional time, monitor behavior, and sustain learner engagement. Importantly, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that hope causes effective classroom management. Rather, they indicate that teachers who report greater hope also tend to report stronger classroom-management efficacy.

Theoretically, the findings extend Snyder's Hope Theory into the domain of online language teaching and highlight the potential value of distinguishing agency from pathways when examining teachers' professional functioning. Practically, the study suggests that teacher-development initiatives may benefit from combining pedagogical preparation with structured goal-setting, alternative-pathway planning, and reflective problem solving. Such initiatives, however, should complement rather than replace institutional, technological, and professional support. Ultimately, the value of the present study lies not in establishing hope as a universal explanation for effective teaching, but in identifying a theoretically meaningful association that warrants more rigorous investigation. Longitudinal, multi-source, and intervention-based research can build on these findings by determining how teacher hope develops over time, how agency and pathways operate within different instructional contexts, and whether strengthening these resources is associated with measurable changes in online classroom-management practices.

Declarations

6 Acknowledgement

6.1 Ethics Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Fasa University of Medical Sciences (FUMS). The ethics approval code for this research is IR.FUMS.REC.1405.090. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles and regulations governing research involving human participants.

6.2 CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

AT and EKH: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Validation, Visualization, and Writing – original draft preparation. Both authors contributed to the interpretation of the findings and approved the final version of the manuscript.

6.3 Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

6.4 Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

6.5 Funding

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6.6 Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence-assisted tools were used during manuscript preparation for language editing and stylistic refinement. The authors retained full responsibility for the study design, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and final content of the manuscript.

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