

Love in L2 and English as a foreign language/English as a second language education: Importance, integration, and implications

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ABSTRACT

This narrative literature review examines the literature on the importance and integration of love in second language (L2) and English as a Foreign Language/English as a Second Language (EFL/ESL) education. We collected, analyzed, and synthesized data thematically from various academic sources, including books, journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and master's theses. The findings are organized into two themes: (1) insights from psychology regarding love as a foundational emotion in L2 education, and (2) insights into and questions about some attempts in the discourse of integrating love in EFL/ESL contexts. We identify a research gap in the lack of direct and explicit exploration of love in L2 education and offer several actionable recommendations for further research and educators' practice. Additionally, within the discourse of EFL/ESL education, we acknowledge contributions from a recent phenomenographic study while discussing its unclear contextualization and raising critical questions about some of its findings.

Furthermore, we critically examine some existing models for loving pedagogy. Ultimately, we encourage L2 and EFL/ESL professionals and enthusiasts to engage in ongoing exploration and implementation of love-based approaches in education. We anticipate their proposed frameworks, whether exclusively applicable to L2 and EFL/ESL education or open to education more broadly, originating from the tertiary education level. These frameworks have the potential to impact the field significantly.

1. Introduction

The concept of integrating love into education has generated increasing interest among educators and practitioners across various educational contexts. Apart from discussions in English as a Foreign Language/English as a Second Language (EFL/ESL) education (Derakhshan et al., 2023; Li & Miao, 2022; Ye et al., 2022; Zhi & Wang, 2023), these areas include Teacher Education, Higher Education, Inclusive Education, Educational Psychology, and several others (e.g., Achirri, 2020; Charles, 2012; Duncan-Williams, 2017; Gillies, 2017; Judge, 2024; Luong et al., 2023; McGarva, 2021; Nelson, 2021; Zembylas, 2020, 2021). Nevertheless, while influential models for incorporating this universal human emotion have emerged from school and childcare settings, such as Love as Pedagogy proposed by Loreman (2011) and Professional Love by Page (2018), similar frameworks at the tertiary education level, to the best of our knowledge, are still anticipated to emerge.

In the fields of second language (L2) and EFL/ESL education, several frameworks have been proposed. Notable examples include the theoretical framework by Barcelos and Coelho (2016) and the combined theoretical and practical framework by Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022). However, these efforts have not yet achieved the expected impact or level of convincingness. Methodologically, these models primarily integrate existing theories and research, rather than presenting new empirical findings. This limitation underscores the need for further empirical research to validate their applicability in diverse real-world settings.

From the perspective of holistic education that encompasses emotional and social aspects alongside cognitive dimension (Miller, 1999; Nasrollahi et al., 2020; Palmer, 1999, 2003, 2004; Rudge, 2010; Tirri, 2009), the integration of love pedagogy into L2 teaching and learning will potentially enhance its practices and outcomes when students' wholeness receives more attention. Consequently, students' motivation, engagement, and success are likely to be elevated or leveraged.

Given the growing interest in integrating love into education, a review of the literature on the importance and integration of love in L2 and EFL/ESL education will significantly benefit individuals involved or interested in these educational domains. Recognizing the necessity for this scholarship, we conducted this review study. We aim to explore insights into the importance and development of integrating love in L2 and EFL/ESL education, its contributions, and existing gaps in the literature.

This review seeks to address the following key questions:

1. What is the rationale for the attention to and integration of love in L2 and EFL/ESL education?
2. How has loving pedagogy been conceptualized and discussed in the context of L2 and EFL/ESL education?

By addressing these questions, this narrative review aims to provide L2 and EFL/ESL professionals, as well as other interested individuals, with valuable insights on this topic, encouraging their engagement in the ongoing exploration and implementation of love in education. Ultimately, we anticipate the emergence of proposed frameworks, either specific to L2 and EFL/ESL education or applicable to education more broadly, from the tertiary education level.

2. Data and research methods

To achieve the objectives of this narrative literature review, we collected relevant data from the ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR databases. The primary keywords used were "love in L2 education/teaching" and "love in EFL/ESL teaching," with a focus on tertiary education. However, recognizing that the integration of love in L2 education is rooted in broader discussions about love in education, we expanded our search to include all levels of education and related fields such as Psychology, Child and Youth Care, and Teacher Education, among others. Given the recent emergence of interest in love within L2 and EFL/ESL education and the breadth and complexity of the literature on love in education, we chose a narrative review approach as it provides an overview of the field that is practical, meaningful, rich, nuanced, and flexible, though not exhaustive (Green et al., 2006; Sukhera, 2022).

Academic sources selected included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and master's theses. We considered only English-language publications, remaining open to varying levels of academic complexity and the linguistic complexity of authors. Non-academic sources and publications that did not address or frame the integration of

love in educational contexts were excluded. Due to the recent emergence of love as a focal point in L2 and EFL/ESL education, publications in this specific area are inherently contemporary. However, because the concept of love as a fundamental and universal human emotion is timeless, we did not impose a time frame when searching related literature on love and love in education in general.

The collected data were then thematically analyzed, compared, contrasted, and synthesized to address our two key research questions. This involved an iterative process of reading and rereading the selected texts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships related to the integration of love in L2 and EFL/ESL education. These themes were then compared and contrasted across different studies and perspectives to develop a comprehensive synthesis that addresses our research questions.

With this foundation established, let us first examine the rationale for emphasizing the importance and integration of love in second language (L2) education.

3. Emotional factors and love in L2 education: Insights from psychology

3.1. Introduction to humanistic psychology in education

The 1970s witnessed the flourishing of the humanistic movement in psychology, fundamentally established by its founders, Rogers (1951) and Maslow (1954). Grounded in holism, this perspective emphasizes the inherent worth of individuals and their capacity for personal growth, meaning, free will, self-determination, and self-actualization. As such, humanistic psychology has had a lasting impact on education across various fields, including religion, social work, psychiatry, nursing, public health, medicine, and law (Grogan, 2008).

Humanistic educators advocate for creating a supportive environment that nurtures emotional intelligence—the ability to understand one’s feelings as well as those of others, which is essential for effective learning. According to Qin (2007), humanistic education is characterized by learner-centeredness, where attention is paid not only to cognitive and linguistic capabilities but also to learners’ emotions and feelings. Maples (1979) asserts that this learner-centred approach in humanistic education aims to educate the whole person, focusing on personal growth and creativity.

3.2. The role of love in language education

The shift to humanistic education has led to a deeper understanding of how emotional factors influence language learning. In response to the principles of humanistic education rooted in the humanistic movement in psychology, applied linguistics has increasingly focused on students’ inner selves. This approach acknowledges that feelings and emotions are integral to cognitive and linguistic development. Such an integration is recognized as crucial for fostering holistic growth (Khatib et al., 2013; Qin, 2007; Tolstova & Levasheva, 2019). As Wang (2005) notes, if basic physical and psychological needs are unmet, individuals may struggle to engage fully in language learning.

Expanding on the understanding of humanistic principles, Barcelos and Coelho (2016) note that although vocabulary conveying aspects and manifestations of the emotion of love has emerged in discussions of language teaching and learning, the term “love” itself remains infrequently used. This observation underscores the ongoing need to explicitly incorporate the concept of love into the discourse on language education, ensuring it is recognized for its significance and its applicability across various sociolinguistic contexts.

Further exploration of this concept could enrich our understanding of its role in language teaching and learning practices.

This recognition of love's importance in language education aligns with broader trends in psychology, particularly the emergence of Positive Psychology, which was founded after humanistic psychology and further expanded the focus on positive emotions in learning contexts.

3.3. Positive psychology's influence on L2 learning

In the 1990s, a new branch of psychology, known as Positive Psychology, emerged, building on the foundations established by humanistic psychology to focus exclusively on human experiences, strengths, and well-being (Seligman, 2019). Essentially, Positive Psychology involves the empirical examination of the lives of ordinary individuals to promote their personal development (Peterson, 2006). It aims to enhance the elements that lead to individuals thriving and experiencing greater happiness (Wang, Derakhshan, & Pan, 2022). This field encourages researchers and practitioners to shift their focus from negative emotions to a broad spectrum of positive emotions and qualities, such as well-being, happiness, creativity, resilience, and love, among others (Wang, Derakhshan, & Noughabi, 2022). This shift has significantly impacted research in applied linguistics, resulting in increased attention to emotional factors (Dewaele et al., 2019). Consequently, the investigation of emotions in L2 learning has gained significant momentum through the emergence of this novel field in psychology (Wang, Derakhshan, & Pan, 2022).

3.4. Distinction between humanistic and positive psychology

While humanistic psychology and *positive psychology* share common goals of promoting human potential and well-being, they diverge significantly in their focus areas. Humanistic psychology frequently addresses existential concerns and the complexities of the human experience, encompassing suffering and the pursuit of personal meaning. Positive Psychology, on the other hand, focuses on enhancing positive emotions and strengths and tends to avoid engagement with the harmful elements of human experience (Joseph, 2021; Waterman, 2013). The distinct focus areas of these two branches of psychology have led to diverging emphases in L2 education and research in the field.

3.5. Emotional factors in applied linguistics

Building on psychological foundations, particularly the emphasis on emotions from both humanistic and Positive Psychology perspectives, the field of applied linguistics has extensively studied the role of emotional factors in language learning. Researchers such as Aragão (2011), Arnold (1999), Imai (2010), and So (2005) have particularly focused on factors like anxiety and motivation. Additionally, recent investigations have explored positive emotional factors, such as enjoyment and hope (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Murphey & Carpenter, 2008). An increasing number of studies illustrate how positive emotions enhance second language learners' experiences (Dewaele et al., 2018; Ghiasvand & Sharifpour, 2024; Shao et al., 2019; Zhi & Wang, 2023; Zhou, 2021) and influence second language teachers' practices (Ghiasvand & Sharifpour, 2024; Kubanyiova, 2019; Zhang, 2021).

From a holistic perspective, we believe that neither of these two approaches alone can satisfactorily address the psychological needs of L2 learners. As a result, it is advisable to balance the two paths for a well-rounded learning experience in L2 education. While this balanced approach has led to increased research on various emotional factors in L2 education, the fundamental human emotion named "love" remains underexplored.

3.6. A research gap in L2 education

The fundamental human condition (Fredrickson, 2013; Hooks, 2003) and part of the broad spectrum of human positive emotions (Seligman, 2019), love, as advocated by Ghiasvand and Sharifpour (2024), Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022), Zhao and Li (2021), plays a vital role in language teaching and learning. However, Barcelos and Coelho (2016) and Dewaele et al. (2019) remark that, despite being a universal human experience, love has been relatively underinvestigated in this field, with only a few studies examining its verbal expression in different cultural contexts. While research in areas like bilingual education (Cummins, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999) and language anxiety (Arnold, 2011; Horwitz, 2001) might indirectly touch on themes related to love, such as discrimination, connection, classroom climate, emotional support, positive relationships, or affective factors in language learning, direct and explicit studies of love under its name as it deserves have not received adequate attention. This identified research gap presents an opportunity to expand our understanding of love's role in L2 education, potentially leading to more comprehensive and effective teaching and learning strategies that incorporate this fundamental human emotion.

3.7. Future research directions

To tackle the gap regarding the role of love in L2 education, Barcelos and Coelho (2016) put forward several guiding questions, including:

- What is the relationship between love and success in language learning and teaching?
- What is the relationship between love and other essential concepts in applied linguistics, such as teacher and learner motivation, identity, agency, and beliefs?
- What are the identities of teachers and learners who act with love?
- Does love play a role in the resilience exhibited by some learners and teachers in adverse conditions of language learning and teaching? (p. 140)

In response to the call prompted by Barcelos and Coelho (2016), future research could explore several dimensions, such as the impact of teacher-student relationships characterized by the care and support provided by teachers. Additionally, examining how love is perceived and expressed by teachers in various nuanced cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into its role in language teaching and learning. While existing studies have focused on emotional factors like motivation and interest, the specific influence of love in creating a supportive and enriching teaching and learning environment remains largely unexamined (Barcelos & Coelho, 2016; Dewaele et al., 2019; Ghiasvand & Sharifpour, 2024; Liu, 2021; Zhao & Li, 2021). Addressing this gap could not only enrich our understanding of emotional dynamics in language teaching and learning but also contribute to the development of more holistic and effective pedagogical practices. This necessitates the adoption of suitable methodologies tailored to the complex nature of love in educational contexts.

Since the concept of love falls within the realm of human emotions that cannot be easily quantified, purely quantitative research underpinned by positivism may not be advisable (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2015). Instead, a qualitative study based on constructivism and interpretivism should be preferred, as it allows for the exploration of the complexity of individuals' love manifestations in educational contexts. While qualitative research offers rich insights, it is essential to address issues of subjectivity and researcher bias (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2015). To mitigate these concerns, researchers can employ strategies such as

reflexivity, where they critically examine their assumptions and biases throughout the research process (Berger, 2015).

Qualitative instruments, such as interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, can enable researchers to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences of teachers and learners, as well as how they perceive and express love in their interactions with one another.

Additionally, mixed-methods research grounded in pragmatism may be helpful in cases where students' performances (such as test or examination results, frequencies of language mistakes, and occurrences of complex sentence structures) should be observed as related parameters (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2015). For instance, quantitative data on student performance could be analyzed alongside qualitative data from teacher interviews to explore the relationship between teacher expressions of love and student learning outcomes.

Considering inquiry strategies, action research could be beneficial for the ongoing professional development of teachers, as this research method enables teachers to continually evaluate and modify their actions to improve and enhance their teaching practices, integrating their perceptions and actualization of love (McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Especially, autoethnography might be a promising methodological choice for educators who have experienced the complexities of integrating love and embracing vulnerability into their teaching practices. As a research method offering very nuanced understandings of social phenomena from the voices of vulnerable insiders within a community that other methods cannot, autoethnography would allow them to reflect on their personal experiences with ultimate personal interpretations and unique individuality while maintaining ethical considerations related to self-disclosure (Anderson, 2006; Bochner, 2017; Dethloff, 2007; Duncan, 2004; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Starr, 2010; Tilley-Lubbs, 2018).

3.8. Recommendations for educators in L2 contexts

From the perspective of Positive Psychology, Barcelos and Coelho (2016) offer recommendations for love to help language teachers enhance their teaching and students' learning, thereby contributing to a better quality of life. First of all, they emphasize that teachers need to understand the concept of love in education, reflecting on their emotions, personal beliefs, and understanding of love. Hence, their next suggestion is "reading about love and trying to live it in daily practice" (Barcelos & Coelho, 2016, p. 141). Furthermore, in more specific terms, Barcelos and Coelho (2016) encourage teachers to realize love through the following actions:

- Observing and listening to students.
- Engaging with students on a personal level through small gestures and actions to recognize their unique qualities, strengths, and potential.
- Noticing and appreciating students' greatness, viewing them as human beings full of potential who deserve love, respect, and care.
- Helping students become aware of their worth and capabilities, recognizing the inherent qualities that make them deserving of love, respect, and care.

This indicates that Barcelos and Coelho (2016) advocate for practical actions that foster more profound understanding and connection beyond surface-level interactions between teachers and students.

Finally, regarding challenges, they advise teachers to reflect on the following questions:

- What would love do now?
- How can I bring more love into what I do?
- How can I teach with more love?
- How can I see my students with more loving eyes? (Barcelos & Coelho, 2016, p. 141).

In response to Barcelos and Coelho's (2016) valuable recommendations, we contribute some practical follow-up expansions. To begin with, regarding the understanding of love in education that they emphasize, we suggest that teachers adopt one or some specific definitions of love as the premise for their pedagogical activities. Love is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a range of emotions, behaviors, and states across different contexts and relationships. Based on this widely accepted view of love, two sensible education-specific examples are those by Hooks (2003) and Oliver (2001). Hooks (2003) perceives love as the integration of care, knowledge, responsibility, trust, respect, and commitment that teachers embody in their profession, where "[a]ll these factors work interdependently" (p. 131). Meanwhile, Oliver (2001) defines love as "a willful decision" that involves "an openness to others" (p. 220) and a "vigilant concern for others" (p. 218), which reflects "an attitude that we willingly cultivate toward others" (p. 220). Underscoring the relational nature of love in human interactions within educational settings, these conceptualizations suggest that love is not merely a passive feeling but a proactive choice made by educators to engage with students in a meaningful way over a continuous course of action, thereby fostering caring and collaborative relationships within the learning environment.

Furthermore, regarding the reflection on personal emotions and beliefs, we encourage L2 educators with strong personal or spiritual convictions to integrate these beliefs into their teaching practices. This educational approach has received attention in scholarly dialogues (Hartse & Nazari, 2018; Tyng et al., 2023; Varghese & Johnston, 2007). Buddhist educators may refer to Christison (2018), who presents her rewarding application of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism-Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration-in navigating challenging situations as an administrator in EFL/ESL in the United States. For Muslim teachers, Hartse and Nazari's (2018) duoethnography offers inspiration, as Nazari, a Muslim lecturer at a university in Iran, shares his experiences of proclaiming his Islamic faith in EFL/ESL teaching practices. To begin classes, he would always write at the top of the board, in Persian or Arabic, a phrase meaning 'In the name of God, The Compassionate, The Merciful', bringing spiritual pleasure to both himself and his students. Hindu educators could gain valuable insights from Sharma's (2018) work, which describes how he incorporated Hindu concepts related to holistic peace, understanding of the universe, self-understanding, and Hindu scriptures into his teaching. Applying traditional Hindu teaching methods that allowed for autonomy, Sharma (2018) engaged his Nepali students in literature-based EFL/ESL classes at the high school level, facilitating debates and discussions about various individual, social, national, and global issues. This approach cultivated and elevated a more profound and broader sense of responsibility. These instances illustrate how educators can thoughtfully integrate their personal or spiritual beliefs into their teaching practices, potentially enriching the learning environment with elements of care, compassion, and holistic understanding that are often associated with love in education. We believe L2 educators can, through introspection, directly

and explicitly proclaim or explore identifying this integration as their actualization of love in the classroom.

While applauding Barcelos and Coelho's (2016) commendable suggested loving actions that focus on positive psychology, we also acknowledge the complex interplay of a broad spectrum of emotions in language learning that is recognized in recent research trends by educators and researchers in the field of SLA (Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024; Shelton-Strong, 2023). Hence, we would like to supplement them with additional steps to address students' negative emotions that inevitably occur from time to time, adopting a balanced approach:

- Noticing a particular student's decrease in effort or interest in learning the target language.
- Discerning, eliciting, and addressing the causes of particular students' negative changes in their learning practices.
- Providing private conversations and support to comfort students who need psychological and emotional assistance.
- Eliciting and reminding students in problematic situations of the ultimate goal of learning the target language to help them sustain it amid temporary challenges.
- Accepting the temporary decline in learning quality of students undergoing challenges due to unavoidable hindering circumstances, and encouraging them to tolerate it.

By doing such things, an L2 teacher should be able to support their students' resilience in overcoming temporary challenges and pursuing the ultimate goal of acquiring the target language in line with their expected plan.

Finally, building on Barcelos and Coelho's (2016) valuable questions, we offer the following L2-nuanced questions for educators facing specific challenges:

- What love (for the target language, pedagogy, students, students' family/parents, personal well-being, or family members financially dependent on my L2 teaching career) primarily guides my resilience in facing this challenge, and how is this love being challenged, weakened, or strengthened by this difficulty?
- In what ways has this challenging situation altered my approach to integrating love into my second language (L2) teaching practices?
- How has this experience changed my behavior towards my students?
- In what ways has this challenge altered my perspective or attitude towards my students?
- How has this situation affected my empathy towards my students?

Having explored the rationale for the importance and integration of love in L2 education and contributed our suggestions to the field, we now turn our attention to recent developments in the discourse on love in EFL/ESL education.

4. Perceptions of loving pedagogy among ESL/EFL learners: Insights and questions

4.1. Learner perceptions of loving pedagogy

Within the context of EFL education, Ghiasvand and Sharifpour's (2024) phenomenographic study presents various perceptions of the nature of loving pedagogy and its

values, characteristics, manifestations, and determinants. It explores these aspects from the perspectives and experiences of undergraduate EFL students, who benefit from, rather than lead or conduct, love-based pedagogy. Accordingly, the study presents various definitions of loving pedagogy, including “non-romantic intimacy and respect,” “pure love based on mutual trust,” and “deep care for students and their emotions” (pp. 11-12). Secondly, loving pedagogy is regarded as essential for EFL learners’ learning success due to its positive impacts on both academic and psychological dimensions. Academically, it enriches classroom engagement and participation, as well as language skills. Psychologically, it makes learners feel comfortable, improves classroom rapport, and fosters positive emotions in learners, including “motivation, confidence, passion, and interest” (p. 12). Meanwhile, it reduces negative emotional states such as “stress, boredom, anxiety, and demotivation” (p. 13). Thirdly, loving pedagogy is characterized by “mutual trust and respect, kindness, care, bonding, empathy, acceptance, intimacy, sacrifice, compassion, affection, and forgiveness” (p. 13). Fourthly, loving pedagogy is manifested in learners’ “confidence in classroom activities; willingness to be productive; sense of safety and importance; high academic performance; high classroom participation; high motivation and self-esteem; low stress in class,” alongside “high intimacy” and “mutual care, respect, and responsibility” in classroom rapport (p. 14). Finally, two categories of determinants are identified. On one hand, five factors that facilitate the realization of loving pedagogy include “teachers’ emotional literacy,” “teachers’ pedagogical expertise,” “students’ acceptance and awareness” of the pedagogy through love, “positive classroom rapport,” and “the patience on the part of teachers, learners, and institutions” (p. 15). On the other hand, nine factors that prevent this pedagogical approach include “strict religious beliefs,” “stigmatizing socio-cultural norms,” “emotion expression fear,” “bigoted educational system,” “students’ negative emotions,” “teachers’ outdated methodologies,” “low spirits,” “lack of facilities,” and “lack of trust and respect” (p. 15).

While “strict religious beliefs” is the highest-rated preventive factor in Ghiasvand and Sharifpour’s (2024) study, this finding may be questioned, particularly by Christians across all levels. The challenge arises from the commonly accepted understanding that Christians of all denominations worship Almighty God, who, as the Bible teaches, is defined as love (Biblica Gateway, 2011) and are commanded to love their fellow human beings as themselves (Crossway, 2016a). Thus, this suggests that the religion-related finding in Ghiasvand and Sharifpour’s (2024) study is likely to be critiqued by Christian individuals at the very least.

While Ghiasvand and Sharifpour’s (2024) study provides valuable insights into learners’ perceptions of loving pedagogy, it is essential to critically examine these findings and consider their broader implications for EFL education.

4.2. Insights and contextualization issues

Whereas other authors offer insights into the strategy of integrating love into education based on established scholarly knowledge in different fields, Ghiasvand and Sharifpour (2024) provide practical understandings drawn from the experiences of beneficiaries rather than the conductors or advocates of a pedagogy of love. Focusing on the EFL context, their study significantly complements existing inquiries into education through love by approaching the subject practically from the position of the other party in a bilateral relation. Their findings are particularly noteworthy as they address five distinct aspects of this emerging topic in the educational domain: mutual trust and respect, kindness, care, bonding, intimacy, and forgiveness. Most findings about the characteristics of loving pedagogy echo Loreman’s (2011)

description, rooted in psychology, philosophy, and religion, of its components: kindness, empathy, intimacy, bonding, sacrifice, forgiveness, acceptance, community, and passion. This captures the attention of those familiar with Loreman's 2011 book, "*Love as Pedagogy*." Nevertheless, Ghasvand and Sharifpour do not adequately contextualize how the participants in their phenomenographic study, as first-year university students, experienced the practice of loving pedagogy as expected in phenomenography.

This lack of contextualization is significant. Phenomenography is a qualitative research method that explores people's diverse but related perceptions of the same phenomenon through their lived experiences (Hajar, 2021; Han & Ellis, 2019; Marton, 1986; Rolls, 2023). It is based on the rationale that individuals experiencing the same phenomenon perceive it differently and react in varied ways; their perceptions may also change over time. The collection of various understandings and critical thoughts on a phenomenon in a phenomenographic study is referred to as the outcome space, which provides collective and nuanced knowledge of the complexities inherent in human social phenomena. Therefore, it is essential to contextualize the experiences of individuals, allowing them to provide their interpretations of the phenomenon. Without this contextualization, the nuanced knowledge gained from the study may remain incomplete and underutilized.

Despite the valuable insights provided by Ghasvand and Sharifpour's (2024) study, their findings raise important questions about the practical implementation of loving pedagogy in EFL contexts.

4.3. Critical questions

Particularly, Ghasvand and Sharifpour (2024) identify patience and students' acceptance and awareness of loving pedagogy as two of the five facilitative factors of this pedagogical approach. They cite a response from one of the participants in their study that "practicing loving pedagogy in EFL contexts takes time, and this requires patience on the part of teachers, students, and institutions. Unless students are ready and aware of loving pedagogy, the implementation of this method is not possible" (p. 15). This prompts critical questions regarding the feasibility of implementing loving pedagogy: Can students be expected to be ready and aware of it without prior exposure? It is possible that some teachers have taught using a loving approach, whether instinctively, ideologically, or both, as a personal pursuit. However, loving pedagogy as a formal subject within educational discourse has only recently emerged (Wang, Derakhshan, & Pan, 2022). If loving pedagogy is a new concept, how can students be expected to be ready for it? How can they become aware of it on their own? These findings in Ghasvand and Sharifpour's (2024) study may prompt responses from other EFL/ESL educators who have experienced or are experiencing different instances of practical application of loving pedagogy in their contexts.

With the aforementioned questions in mind, we will now proceed to critically analyze various models of loving pedagogy proposed for second language (L2) education.

4.4. Models for loving pedagogy in L2 education: Attempts and issues

Concerned with the importance of love in L2 practices, Barcelos and Coelho (2016) conduct a review study examining the role of love in education from various perspectives. Among the works they investigate are those by Maturana (2005) from a biological and philosophical view; Fredrickson (2013) from a social psychological stance; Hooks (2003) from feminism and social activism; Day (2004), Freire (2005) and Liston (2000, 2008) from educational positions. Barcelos and Coelho (2016) summarize that the most common features

of a pedagogy of love include six elements: ethics, growth, care, respect, freedom, and dialogue, which reflect the principles of positive psychology. With the conclusion that love-related concepts are essential to effective language teaching practices, Barcelos and Coelho's (2016) six-element model reflects the perspective of positive psychology. As such, it partially overlaps with Loreman's (2011) nine-element model, which uses different terminology. Due to its more specific focus on L2 education, it is less comprehensive than Loreman's, whose context is general education. Before Barcelos and Coelho (2016), Loreman (2011) developed a model of a pedagogy of love, drawing on philosophical, psychological, and religious insights, which consists of nine elements: kindness, empathy, intimacy, bonding, sacrifice, forgiveness, acceptance, community, and passion.

By combining the nine elements presented by Loreman (2011) with the six elements from Barcelos and Coelho (2016), Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022) introduce a theoretical model of loving pedagogy in L2 education composed of 15 elements. This model is illustrated in Figure 1 of this review.

Figure 1

Elements of a Pedagogy of Love



Note. The data are from “Positioning an agenda on a loving pedagogy in second language acquisition: Conceptualization, practice, and research” by Y. Wang, A. Derakhshan, and Z. Pan, 2022, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 894190 (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.894190>)

On the surface, this model of 15 elements appears to synthesize insights from two sources. However, the six elements identified by Barcelos and Coelho (2016) are already included in Loreman's (2011) framework. Indeed, these six elements are discussed throughout Loreman's work. Therefore, Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan's (2022) model is just an assembled cluster of the six elements of Barcelos and Coelho's (2016) model and nine components of Loreman's (2011) without insights into the common grounds or shared concepts of these two frameworks. Consequently, Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan's (2022) combined model does not offer any new insights into the discourse on the pedagogy of love.

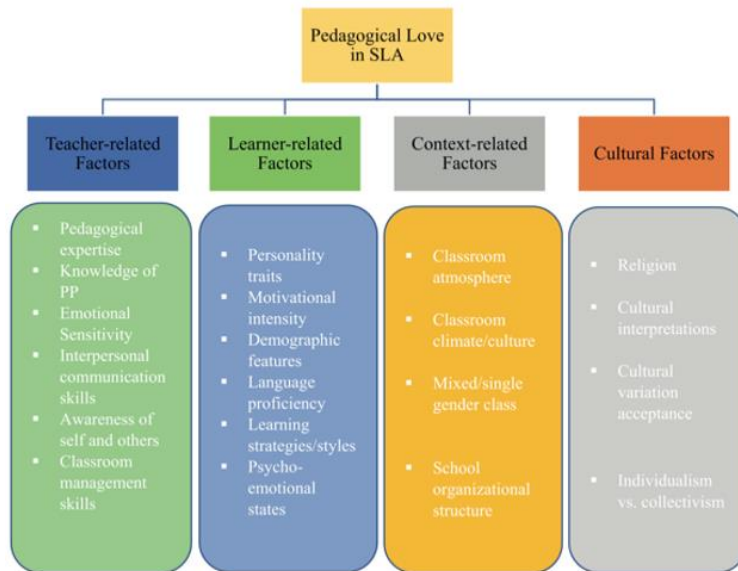
Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022) further state that the introduction of a framework for implementing a pedagogy of love in second language education requires further development. They claim to address this gap by proposing a tentative and practical model. They choose to revise Page's (2018) model, which they recognize as one of the first proposed frameworks for a pedagogy of love.

Page's (2018) model is highly valued and well-received by educators. It recommends a process for implementing what she refers to as 'Professional Love,' based on theories from psychology and philosophy. In her work, Page (2018) defines "Professional Love" (p. 125) as a complex and essential concept within the pedagogy of love in early childhood education. It encompasses a dynamic interaction that nurtures a "Triangle of Love" (p. 125), involving the child, parent, and practitioner. This triangle complements the parent-child relationship, enhancing emotional security and development without threatening familial bonds. It emphasizes the reciprocal relationships that develop between caregivers, children, and parents, highlighting the importance of emotional connections in fostering secure attachments and positive interactions.

Building on this concept, Page (2018) provides guidelines for early childhood education practitioners to implement Professional Love, which comprises a model of four steps as follows:

- Step 1: Resilience and Self-Awareness. Practitioners must train themselves to become emotionally resilient and self-aware, capable of reflecting on their actions and interactions with children and parents.
- Step 2: Decentralization. Practitioners need to decenter themselves by prioritizing the needs of others without judgment, rather than focusing solely on their own needs.
- Step 3: Cultivation of Intimacy. Practitioners must cultivate emotional intimacy in their relationships with children and parents to foster deeper, more meaningful connections.
- Step 4: Development of Reciprocal Relationships. Ultimately, practitioners must foster genuine reciprocal relationships with children and parents, which are essential for establishing trust and acceptance in the caregiving process.

Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022, p. 05) claim their model is based on Page's (2018) influential model and use the abbreviation SLA (second language acquisition) for L2 learning. Their suggested model in L2 education is illustrated in Figure 2 of this review.

Figure 2*A Model for the Implementation of a Pedagogy of Love in SLA*

Note. The data are from “Positioning an agenda on a loving pedagogy in second language acquisition: Conceptualization, practice, and research” by Y. Wang, A. Derakhshan, and Z. Pan, 2022, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 894190 (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.894190>)

Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan’s (2022) proposed practical model of implementing love pedagogy in L2 education does not provide actionable guidelines for interested L2 educators as expected.

By and large, when seeing the phrase “A model for the implementation of ...”, we logically expect to see a list of steps or phases presented with action verbs. In addition to action verbs, noun phrases that indicate and imply actions or processes are also commonly used. As an alternative to verb phrases, noun phrases in the context of an implementation framework often encapsulate key activities that constitute practicing a concept or implementing a plan. Such action verbs or noun phrases demonstrate a series of phases or stages, which include distinct steps often connected sequentially or iteratively. This structure outlines key activities and their sequence for effectively implementing a particular concept or system, as seen in Page’s (2018) model or Loreman’s (2011) framework mentioned earlier.

Considering this, we believe that the model suggested by Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022) does not provide a practical framework for implementing a pedagogy of love in L2 education. The first reason is that it simply lists various factors influencing the implementation of a loving pedagogy, namely teacher-related factors, learner-related factors, context-related factors, and cultural issues, without specifying concrete actions or steps for implementation. Secondly, when adapting Page’s (2018) earlier framework for early education, the authors acknowledge that revisions are needed to make Page’s influential model suitable for L2 education; however, they do not provide details on what those revisions should entail.

In summary, while Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan’s (2022) model highlights important considerations regarding factors influencing loving pedagogy in L2 contexts, it does not constitute a practical model applicable for implementing this pedagogy as claimed by its authors and suggested by its title. As a result, the development of more effective models for integrating love in L2 education is necessary.

4.5. Broadly applicable loving models in education: Insights and inspirations

Originally, Page's (2018) model of Professional Love was intended to guide practitioners in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to excel in their roles. However, its guidelines have also been referenced in various areas of this field, including practitioner education (Solvason et al., 2021), professional development and policy making (Fairchild, 2021), national curricula management (Barblett et al., 2021), and educators' motivation (Quiñones et al., 2018). In addition, references to this model appear in other fields such as Outside School Hours Care (Barblett et al., 2021), Teacher Education (Luong et al., 2023), Primary Education (Ní Chléirigh, 2023; Wood & Malone, 2024), and Higher Education (Nelson, 2021). Particularly, discussions in EFL/ESL education also draw upon this model (Derakhshan et al., 2023; Li & Miao, 2022; Ye et al., 2022; Zhi & Wang, 2023).

Likewise, the principles outlined by Loreman in his 2011 work "Love as Pedagogy" targeted children and adolescents in schools. Nevertheless, these principles have also gained recognition in L2 education, including EFL and ESL education (Charles, 2012). Moreover, evidence shows that Loreman's (2011) work is now referenced in various academic settings beyond its original context of traditional education in schools. These include Teacher Education (Gillies, 2017), Higher Education (Achirri, 2020; Charles, 2012), Inclusive Education (Duncan-Williams, 2017), Educational Psychology (McGarva, 2021), Christian Early Childhood Education and Care (Judge, 2024), Democratic Education and Pedagogy (Zembylas, 2020, 2021), Educational Leadership (Jeyaraj & Gandolfi, 2019), Interculturality (Achirri, 2020), Political Science (Zembylas, 2020, 2021), Child and Youth Care (Vincent, 2016), and Psychology (Zimmerman, 2021). This suggests that Loreman's concepts are applicable across multiple contexts, making significant contributions to ongoing discussions about emotional engagement and holistic education.

Two key points can be learned from the profound resonance and vast implications of Page's (2018) and Loreman's (2011) works. First, the widespread relevance stems from love being a universal human value inherent in our existence. Therefore, from a sustainable perspective, any educational agenda aimed at fostering genuine individual growth and societal development cannot ignore this fundamental human value: love. Second, any framework - whether theoretical, practical, or both - that centers on and promotes this human value is inherently capable of reaching beyond its original context. Thus, the relationship between these two points is clear: the broader relevance and applicability of a love-based framework arise from the universality of love.

This learning is significant in different ways. To begin with, it inspires people in all human-related fields to consider engaging with love-related frameworks in both their professional and personal lives. By doing so, they are more likely to optimize their individual development and socially constructive contributions simultaneously. Furthermore, it offers a sensible hope to scholars who propose a logically developed love-related model in any discipline: their work can plant seeds that bear more fruits beyond their small gardens in front of their homes, as it has the potential to be acknowledged and utilized in ongoing interdisciplinary discourses that extend beyond their immediate contexts. Finally, it affirms what love deserves in its rights: the world in which humans exist should be a kingdom of love, one that demands relentless learning and growth. This affirmation pushes the horizon of our contemplation about human life with this question: What if our lives were guided by a love that transcends boundaries?

5. Conclusion and implications

This review highlights two main themes: (1) insights from psychology regarding love as a foundational emotion in L2 education, and (2) insights into and questions about some attempts in the discourse of integrating love in EFL/ESL contexts.

Progress in psychology has led to growing attention to a broader spectrum of emotional factors in applied linguistics, including L2 and EFL/ESL education. However, the term “love” has not been frequently utilized in the discourse on language education, despite the emergence of other vocabulary items that indicate its various nuances. Love should be directly and explicitly incorporated into the discourse under its name, as it deserves, to deepen our understanding of its value in education and human growth.

Calls for further exploration of love in L2 education have been made, and helpful guidelines have been offered by Barcelos and Coelho (2016). Nevertheless, not every attempt to respond in the EFL/ESL area has been convincing. Ghiasvand and Sharifpour’s (2024) study offers insights into the views of undergraduate learners, but its aforementioned methodological weaknesses render its findings partially questionable. Similarly, issues with those theoretical and so-called practical frameworks proposed by Wang, Derakhshan, and Pan (2022) have also been identified.

Against this backdrop, the findings of this review should encourage further investment in research and action in the discourse of love across various domains, especially in tertiary education. Consequently, L2 education practitioners, including EFL/ESL professionals, as well as those interested in this field, should be motivated to develop love-based frameworks. These proposed frameworks can be tailored specifically to EFL/ESL education or be more general. In either case, they hold the potential to extend their impact beyond this field, provided that they are logically constructed and practically applicable. As demonstrated by the works of Loreman (2011) and Page (2018), such efforts can significantly contribute to holistic education and foster a deeper understanding of love’s role in human development.

By embracing love as a foundational value in education, we can not only enhance learning experiences but also contribute significantly to the holistic development of individuals and communities. With this understanding in mind, we anticipate seeing meaningful contributions emerge from L2 and EFL/ESL professionals and enthusiasts in this critical area of research and practice alike!

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The manuscript clearly identifies a research gap; the manuscript opens new directions for further research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CRedit: **Le Quang Truc**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Data Curation, Investigation, Formal Analysis; **Yabit Bin Alas**: Project Administration, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision, Validation, Visualization; **Shamsinar Binti Hj Husain**: Supervision, Writing - Review & Editing, Validation, Visualization; **Nor Azura Abdullah**: Supervision, Writing - Review & Editing, Validation, Visualization.

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