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Research Article

Exploring the Intersections among Masculinity, Emotionality, Willingness to Communicate, and Communication Apprehension: A Qualitative Inquiry

Muhammed Kök[1], Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Education, ELT Programme, muhammed.kok@omu.edu.tr

Dinçay Köksal[2], Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Education, ELT Programme, dkoksal@comu.edu.tr

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Abstract: Conformity to masculine gender roles (CTMGR) is characterized by toughness, hardness, emotional restrictiveness, competitiveness, and dominance in general. Although it has been widely studied in other disciplines, little is known about its role in second/foreign language (L2) learning. Addressing this gap, this exploratory case study investigates how eight male Turkish undergraduate and graduate English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) learners perceive, experience, and interpret the intersection between CTMGR and L2 affective constructs (i.e., emotionality, willingness to communicate, and communication apprehension). Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with male EFL learners majoring in English Language Teaching. Participants were purposefully selected for their potential to provide insights into the intersection between masculinity and L2. Thematic analysis using MAXQDA revealed that CTMGR was commonly associated with suppressing emotional expression and with reluctance to engage in communication. This suppression was perceived as limiting male EFL learners' willingness to communicate and as exacerbating their L2 communication apprehension. Cultural and societal expectations in Türkiye were also found to play a significant role in shaping these perceived dynamics. This study is the first of its kind in the EFL context to qualitatively reveal the intersections between masculinity and L2 affective constructs. The findings offer pedagogical insights for developing more inclusive, gender-aware, and culturally responsive L2 teaching practices.

Keywords: *Conformity to traditional masculine roles, emotional intelligence, L2 willingness to communicate, L2 communication apprehension*

INTRODUCTION

The psychology of L2 learning significantly shapes L2 learners' learning experiences and expectations, particularly with reference to their affective and emotional constructs (Cong & Li, 2022). In other words, socioemotional factors, encompassing learners' affective states, play a pivotal role in shaping their cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral engagement towards L2 language. This is essential in monolingual EFL contexts, such as Türkiye, where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited (Kök, 2025; Uztosun & Kök, 2024). In such settings, oral communication is considered a 'Cinderella skill', often problematized in the L2 research agenda (Kök, 2020). For this reason, the development of L2 communicative competence, targeted through co-constructed, meaningful, and communicative activities, is highly recommended for EFL learners, since L2 learning can only be fostered in meaningful contexts through communicative tasks (Hymes, 1992; Nunan, 1989).

[1] *ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7529-8679 (Corresponding Author)*
[2] *ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8681-4093*
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Among the affective constructs, L2 communication apprehension (L2 CA) is among the most debilitating constraints on L2 oral performance (Uztosun & Kök, 2024). It refers to the anxiety or fear experienced by L2 learners when engaging in verbal interaction in the target language (Akkuş, 2021). L2 CA has been reported to negatively influence L2 learners' proficiency, academic success, classroom participation, interpersonal communication, and overall confidence in L2 settings (Carrión-Durán & Carrión-Espinosa, 2023; Cong & Li, 2022; Dörnyei, 2014). Particularly, in the Turkish EFL context, numerous studies (e.g., Aydın, 2008; Uztosun & Kök, 2024; Yaşar, 2020) have consistently stressed that L2 CA is an individual, affective, and persistent challenge that impairs EFL learners' willingness to participate in L2 spoken activities, thus hindering their L2 expression skills and communicative behaviors. In other words, it negatively influences EFL learners' presentation skills, interpersonal communication, discussions, dyadic interactions, and overall oral performance in both class and public settings.

Several individual, affective, and sociocultural variables have been identified as potential contributors to L2 CA, including personality traits, linguistic competence, out-of-class L2 engagement, gender, and social roles and expectations (Dörnyei, 1990; Kantar & Kök, 2025; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Öz, 2016; Uztosun & Kök, 2024). Considering gender as a social culture, traditional masculine norms could be associated with higher levels of L2 CA in male EFL learners since traditional masculinity involves specific normative dictates such as hardness, toughness, dominance, less talkativeness, restrictive emotionality, absoluteness, completeness, competitiveness, faultlessness, and verbal vulnerability (Kankan & Odacı, 2017; Kantar, 2021; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023; Mahalik et al., 2003). In other words, conventional masculinity, perpetuated through social and cultural expectations, is shaped by dominance, strength, competitiveness, and emotional restraint, which might exert toxic influences on male EFL learners' L2 communication skills.

The growing body of literature (e.g., Feder et al., 2010; Kalkan & Odacı, 2017; Kantar, 2021; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kantar & Yalçın, 2024; Kök & Kantar, 2023; O'Neil et al., 1986) also highlights that men who show strong adherence to traditional masculinity are generally aggressive, control-oriented, competitive, less compassionate, and keen on illustrating a perfect, absolute, and complete image in public areas. In other words, the current body of findings suggest that excessive alliance with such norms and roles can limit men's engagement in affective and communicative domains (Feder et al., 2010; Kantar, 2019; Kalkan & Odacı, 2017; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023), both of which are fundamental elements for successful L2 speaking performance, where sharing opinions and feelings are highly necessitated. In this respect, it can be argued that Türkiye, as an EFL context characterized by gender role divisions (Kutuk et al., 2021), rigidly ascribes gender-based social roles, and an intense valorization of traditional masculine ideologies, which could provide a normative framework that might significantly constrain male EFL learners' emotional expressiveness, diminish their L2 willingness to communicate (WTC), and increase their L2 CA. In other words, excessive CTMGR could emerge as a restrictive role in male EFL learners' L2 communication ability, emotionality, and willingness to engage in verbal skills.

Relating conventional masculinity with L2 CA and L2 WTC, it should be no surprise that emotional intelligence (EI) is another relevant affective construct. As a sub-category of social intelligence, EI equips individuals with the capacity to recognize, regulate, and express emotions in socially adaptive ways (Schutte et al., 2009). Individuals with higher EI are believed to be better expressionists who are open to sharing thoughts, consider the needs of others, and are eager to relate empathetically (Sternberg, 2003). In the context of EFL learning, Öz (2015) asserts that EFL learners' emotional levels, including empathy, awareness, and sensitivity, can also impact their L2 communication skills; hence, they are positively associated with enhanced communication skills, empathy, and sensitivity. However, previous studies have also noted gender differences in EI levels, illustrating that male individuals, particularly those adhering firmly to masculine norms, often exhibit lower levels of empathy, self-disclosure, self-compassion, and emotional openness (Kantar & Kök, 2025; Levant, 1992; Levant et al., 2003; Makvana, 2014; Shehzad & Mahmoodi, 2013). From this

perspective, traditional masculine norms and roles, which dictate norms such as 'boys do not cry' or 'boys do not talk much', might create barriers to male EFL learners' emotionality and WTC levels.

Despite the growing interdisciplinary body of quantitative literature on the linkage among masculinity and self-compassion, stigmatization, stereotyping behaviors, self-disclosure, and L2 anxiety (e.g., Kantar & Yalçın, 2024; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023; Kutuk et al., 2021), little is known about how male Turkish EFL learners perceive, experience, and interpret the intersection between CTMGR and L2 communication-related affective constructs. This lack of qualitative insight limits our understanding of how gendered emotionality and WTC perceptibly manifest themselves in L2 oral interactions. Previous studies have also mainly relied on self-report scales and quantitative data, such as correlational or predictive, thus leaving a knowledge and methodological gap in the current literature regarding how subjective perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of male EFL learners negotiate these affective tensions. In other words, the underlying subjective perceptive, experiential, and interpretive frameworks of male Turkish EFL learners on the intersection between traditional masculinity and L2 communication remain largely underexplored from a qualitative perspective. Thus, this study addresses an exploratory gap by focusing on a qualitative exploration of how CTMGR influences male EFL learners' emotionality, L2 WTC, and L2 CA in the Turkish EFL context. By doing so, this study aims to fill the uncharted gap in the L2 research arena, offering insights into the masculinity and L2 language.

Accordingly, the following research question was addressed:

RQ : How do male Turkish EFL learners perceive, experience, and interpret the intersection between conformity to masculine gender roles and L2 affective constructs (i.e., emotionality, willingness to communicate, and communication apprehension)?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is important to make a clear conceptual distinction between sex and gender to maintain terminological precision. *Sex* refers to biological attributes, whereas *gender* encompasses the socially and culturally constructed identity that emerges through interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Within this understanding, gender roles can be best explained through Social Role Theory (SRT). Rooted in Eagly's (1987) conceptualization, SRT argued that gender differences derive from socially assigned roles. These assigned gender roles are thus adopted, internalized, and maintained through socialization processes where individuals learn and reproduce gendered behaviors modeled by adults. In this way, identities, attributes, and traits associated with masculinity and femininity are continuously (re)shaped by the social roles and cultural expectations embedded in social contexts. Consequently, how gender is perceived and enacted within a society directly impacts individuals' expectations, attitudes, and behaviors.

Gender is a social construct internalized through cultural expectations; thus, it is associated with particular roles and behavioral norms within a community (Appleby, 2014; Eagly, 1987). Through socialization, individuals internalize the gender-based expectations that determine (in)appropriate behaviors. Scholars (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Kantar, 2021; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023) argue that individuals adhere to group norms and expectations to preserve their in-group identity and obtain social approval, thus fostering both a sense of belonging and the reproduction of the normative schema at the same time. Therefore, SRT serves as a social framework that prescribes, dictates, and sustains behavioral norms, often reinforcing gender-based divisions.

From this perspective, particular roles, traits, and characteristics are socially attributed to men and women, and adherence to these attributes is often regarded as necessary for social validation (Kantar, 2021; Schneider & Boss, 2019). In other words, the degree of (in)compliance with traditional masculine gender norms and roles determines how men are seen as masculine by their society. However, rigid adherence to traditional gender norms and roles could limit professional preferences, verbal expressiveness, and expressive skills. For example, a woman might avoid pursuing a profession

regarded as unfeminine, or a man could suppress verbal disclosure because it is perceived as *unmanly*. Such societal prescriptions might limit individuals' potential for professional growth, as well as linguistic or emotional constraints.

Türkoğlu (2013) argues that traditional masculinity includes socially constructed roles and norms prescribing how men should act, feel, behave, or even dress. Also, these roles can be extended to facial expressions, hairstyles, activities, and speech styles (Milani, 2015). In this respect, masculinity is often characterized by a variety of traditional norms and expectations such as being strong, active, rational, competitive, authoritative, and emotionally detached (Appleby, 2014; Feder et al, 2010; Kantar & Kök, 2023; O'Neil et al., 1986). In addition, men are often socialized to avoid activities or characteristics viewed as *feminine* (Pownall & Heflick, 2023). Such explicit or implicit gender stereotypes could undermine men's involvement or performance, especially when they carry negative connotations. The excessive internalization of traditional masculine norms can become restrictive, particularly in terms of emotional expression, linguistic involvement, and verbal disclosure.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an exploratory case study research design, given that it focuses on a context-specific case, namely male Turkish EFL learners situated within a particular sociocultural and educational context, and allows for an in-depth, contextually rich examination of complex and interrelated affective phenomena (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). More specifically, drawing on the qualitative phase of a larger mixed-methods dissertation, the study seeks to explore how these participants subjectively experience, interpret, and negotiate the intersections between conformity to traditional masculine gender roles and key affective constructs, including EI, L2 WTC, and communication apprehension. Given the cultural and experiential nature of these constructs, an exploratory case study design is particularly well-suited to capturing participants' meaning-making processes and the subtle ways in which these variables interact within a specific EFL context.

Participants

The participants were purposively selected to ensure rich insights relevant to the research focus. Accordingly, eight voluntary male EFL learners majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT) were recruited from three different academic levels. At the time of data collection, three participants were enrolled in the B.A. program, three in the M.A. program, and two in the Ph.D. program. The inclusion of participants from undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels enabled the exploration of masculinity-related affective experiences across varying stages of academic, thus enriching the depth and variability of the qualitative insights.

The criteria for participation were: (a) being male, (b) willingness to reflect critically on personal experiences related to masculinity and affective constructs such as EI, WTC, and communication apprehension. These eight individuals were selected as they were willing to provide rich, reflective, and contextual accounts of how masculine role conformity intersects with affective dimensions in EFL learning. Participants' anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms. Table 1 presents the descriptive profiles of the participants in accordance with the order of their interview participation.

Table 1. Descriptive profile of the participants (n=8)

Number of participants	Pseudonyms	Age	Abroad experience	Other foreign languages	Length of the interview	Educational Circle
1	Burak	24	No	A2(Spanish)	21 mins	M.A
2	Mustafa	23	No	No	25 mins	M.A

3	Ediz	22	No	No	24 mins	B.A (3rd year)
4	Osman	22	No	No	24 mins	B.A (3rd year)
5	Yaman	20	One week	No	14 mins	B.A (1st year)
6	Erkan	30	6 months	No	24 mins	M.A
7	Mithat	40	2 weeks	No	38 mins	Ph.D.
8	Umut	30	3 months	No	30 mins	Ph.D.

Data Collection Tools

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview form, including demographic information such as age, educational level, overseas experience, and other foreign languages, as well as 11 semi-structured questions. The interview protocol was developed based on the research question and the current literature on gender and language. Before finalizing the questions, expert feedback was obtained from professionals in language education and psychology to ensure content validity and clarity. After reaching consensus on the arrangement and flow of the questions, the interview protocol posed questions under four main sections: background, transition, key, and closing, as suggested by Castillo-Montoya (2016). The length of the interviews is clearly depicted in Table 1 above.

Researcher Role

In qualitative methods, researchers are advised to document how they position themselves during data collection and analysis to illustrate their roles, thereby reflecting transparency and trustworthiness for readers (Gürsoy, 2021). In the present study, the qualitative data were collected by one of the authors, a Turkish male researcher who was a former ELT student and was conducting the dissertation project at the time of data collection. While this shared sociocultural and academic background may have facilitated rapport and openness during the interviews, it also carried the potential risk of implicit bias or taken-for-granted assumptions, particularly when addressing sensitive issues such as conformity to masculine norms and emotional expression.

To mitigate these risks, the researcher consciously adopted a neutral, non-directive stance throughout the interview process, avoiding leading questions and evaluative responses. The interview sessions began with a welcoming, informative tone, during which participants were briefed on the aims of the study, the prospective publication process, issues of confidentiality, and their right to voluntary participation. During the interviews, the researcher refrained from probing questions that might evoke traumatic experiences and relied primarily on open-ended prompts, using elaborative follow-up questions only when participants' responses required clarification or further depth. A consistent interactional tone was maintained across all sessions. The researcher recorded each interview protocol with the participants' permission during the interview sessions.

Data Collection Processes

The qualitative data were collected in the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, using Zoom, because the interviewees were living in different parts of Türkiye at the time of data collection, which prompted the researchers to conduct all sessions online. All interviews were scheduled based on the times participants preferred to attend. The participants attended the interviews after school/working hours, between 7 pm and 11 pm. Before the interviews, participants were asked to check their laptops and internet connections in case of any technical issues. All the interview sessions were recorded by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data using MAXQDA 2020, as suggested by Creswell (2021), since it is one of the effective software programs that help researchers systematically collect and interpret data. There was no coding list beforehand, and descriptive coding was used, which helps the readers see what researchers have seen and heard (Saldana, 2019). In this respect, the data analysis occurred in three stages. First, the oral recordings were listened to repeatedly to become familiar with the qualitative dataset. Afterward, the researcher coded all the interviews and created categories by grouping similar codes and assigning descriptive labels. Upon creating the categories, the researcher combined related categories into themes to demonstrate their relevance to the research question. Though the interview was conducted in the participants' native language (i.e., Turkish) to make them feel competent in expressing themselves, the researchers analyzed and provided quotations in English, translating the data verbatim.

Credibility and Ethics

In qualitative methods, scholars have suggested quality criteria (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Nunan & Bailey, 2009) to address reliability and validity concerns in qualitative studies, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To provide credibility, one of the researchers contacted the voluntary participants in person to help them feel relaxed and to let them read the interview questions before they were asked. Also, the researcher informed them of anonymity during the data presentation. In addition, during the interviews, confirmation checks and questions (when necessary) were addressed to get detailed insights or elaborations on what they meant. During the creation of the interview content, expert feedback was obtained from professionals with expertise in language and gender studies, particularly in ELT and psychology, to ensure content validity and clarity of the questions. Until a mutual consensus was reached, the questions were reorganized. Furthermore, after completing the data analysis, a research assistant rechecked all codes, categorizations, themes, and figures in MAXQDA to provide cross-checks for reliability. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider agreement rates of 85% or higher as strong inter-coder reliability. In this respect, our cross-check yielded an inter-coder agreement rate of 92%, an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability according to Miles and Huberman's (1994) benchmark.

Regarding transferability, the entire qualitative process is presented in Table 1, including the interview length and other descriptive information, thereby detailing the qualitative process. While presenting the findings, direct quotations (when necessary) are presented without alteration. Regarding dependability, careful attention was paid to asking the same questions and following the same interview protocol format as possible. Besides, similar codes were assigned to similar statements during data coding. Lastly, all codes, categories, and themes created can be transparently seen in our MAXQDA file, providing confirmability.

This study, which is based on the first author's dissertation, was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Ethical committee approval for the study was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (Reference Number: E-84026528-050.01.04-2300063069). All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, provided voluntary consent at the beginning of the study, and were permitted to read all interview questions before the interview recording began. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research by using pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study were consistent with the research question.

RQ1 : How do male Turkish EFL learners perceive, experience, and interpret the intersection between conformity to masculine gender roles and L2 affective constructs (i.e., emotionality, willingness to communicate, and communication apprehension)?

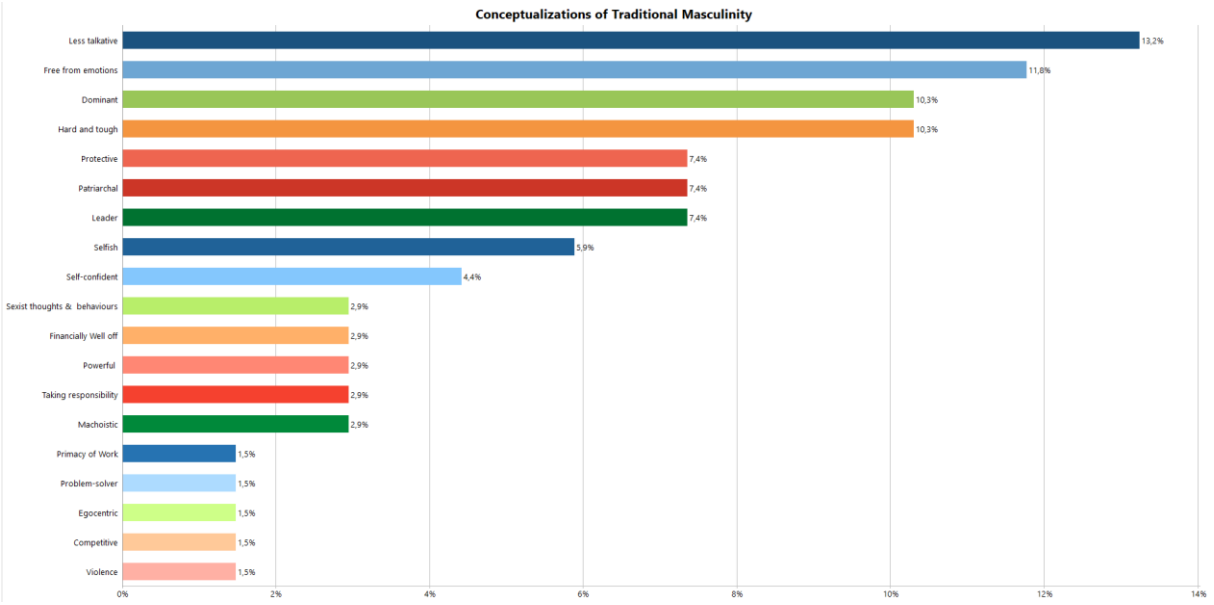


Participants were asked how they define and conceptualize traditional masculinity, particularly in Turkish culture. The findings indicated several common conceptualizations. Figures 1 and 2 present the code cloud and diagram depicting participants' perceptions of traditional masculinity. The code size increases as its frequency increases.

Figure 1. Code cloud illustrating participants' conceptualizations regarding traditional masculinity



Figure 2. Code diagram showing the frequency of conceptualizations regarding traditional masculinity



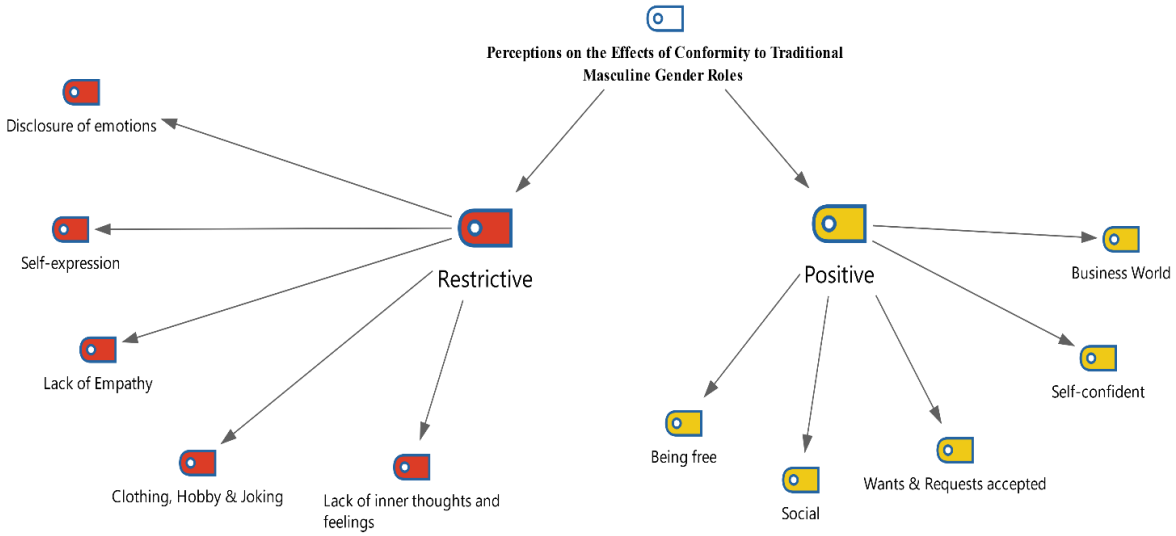
The most frequently attributed characteristics of traditional masculine roles and norms in Turkish culture are as follows: 'less talkative', 'free from emotions', 'dominant', 'hard and tough', 'protective', 'patriarchal', 'leader', and 'selfish'. These codes clearly show what norms and roles are

expected from men in Turkish culture. Regarding linguistic or verbal involvement, one of the important findings is that Turkish culture seems to expect men to be less talkative and free from emotions, limiting their oral production ability and emotionality.

The Effect(s) of CTMGR on Men

To explore the potential influence of adherence to traditional masculine gender roles on male individuals, participants were asked to reflect on and articulate how such conformity affects their emotions, behaviors, and communicative tendencies. Specifically, the interview protocol included questions to uncover the perceived roles CTMGR plays in shaping male learners' linguistic and affective experiences. Based on the thematic analysis of the qualitative data, the findings revealed two overarching categories that capture participants' perspectives: (1) restrictive effects, referring to the limiting or inhibiting consequences of CTMGR, and (2) positive influences, which denote areas where traditional masculinity was perceived to illustrate beneficial or empowering outcomes. In fact, these categories represent the dual nature of CTMGR as perceived by the participants. Figure 4 below presents a visual summary of these two main themes along with the associated codes derived from participant responses.

Figure 3. Effects of conformity to traditional masculine gender roles on men



Concerning the restrictive dimension of CTMGR, participants identified five distinct domains in which such adherence exerts limiting effects on male individuals. These areas, as perceived by the interviewees, include: (1) inhibition of emotional disclosure, referring to the internalized pressure to suppress the feelings and emotions; (2) limited self-expression, which reflects difficulties in articulating personal opinions, thoughts, feelings, or vulnerabilities; (3) reduced capacity for empathy, suggesting a social boundary distancing from emotional openness to others; (4) constraints related to clothing, hobbies, and humor, where traditional norms discourage engagement in activities or expressions perceived as non-masculine; and (5) suppression of inner thoughts and feelings, denoting a reluctance to share personal reflections. These themes collectively indicate how CTMGR might function as a socio-emotional constraint in the lives of male Turkish EFL learners. Some of the related quotations are as follows:

"It causes these men to suppress and repress themselves, to suppress their emotions, their psychology, consciously or unconsciously. So, at this point, definitely, men do not cry". (Mithat)

"There are restrictive and unwritten rules, such as men don't cry, men talk less, men do this, men do that". (Mithat)

"They have the psychology of being strong, not letting themselves be oppressed, not humiliating themselves, so they are more anxious when they speak". (Edis)

"Talking too much is something that is attributed to women. Talking less is something that is attributed to men. It is negative in this respect". (Mustafa)

"The characteristics that they always expect women to have in society, such as emotionalism and crying, and those are characteristics that they [men] would never do". (Umut)

"There would be many male ballerinas in our country, but I'm sure many men avoid them because of the tights, or I don't know, because those behaviors are seen as a bit feminine". (Edis)

In addressing the perceived advantages of CTMGR, several participants articulated the belief that adherence to masculine norms might afford men a degree of freedom, privilege, and confidence, particularly in contrast to women's experiences. Participants suggested that, in Türkiye's sociocultural context, men's desires and requests are more readily accepted or validated, especially in professional and public domains. This perception of male advantage was reflected in several emergent codes: 'being free', 'being social', 'readily accepted wants and requests', 'having self-confidence', and easily thriving in the 'business world'. These codes suggest that traditional masculinity, based on participants' perceptions and interpretations, allocates certain forms of social capital and systemic privilege, showing gender-based asymmetries in expression and opportunity. Quotations exemplifying these perceived benefits are presented below:

"Traditional masculinity is very advantageous for man because everything is under his control… he arranges everything… He makes the final decision…What he says is accepted" (Mithat)

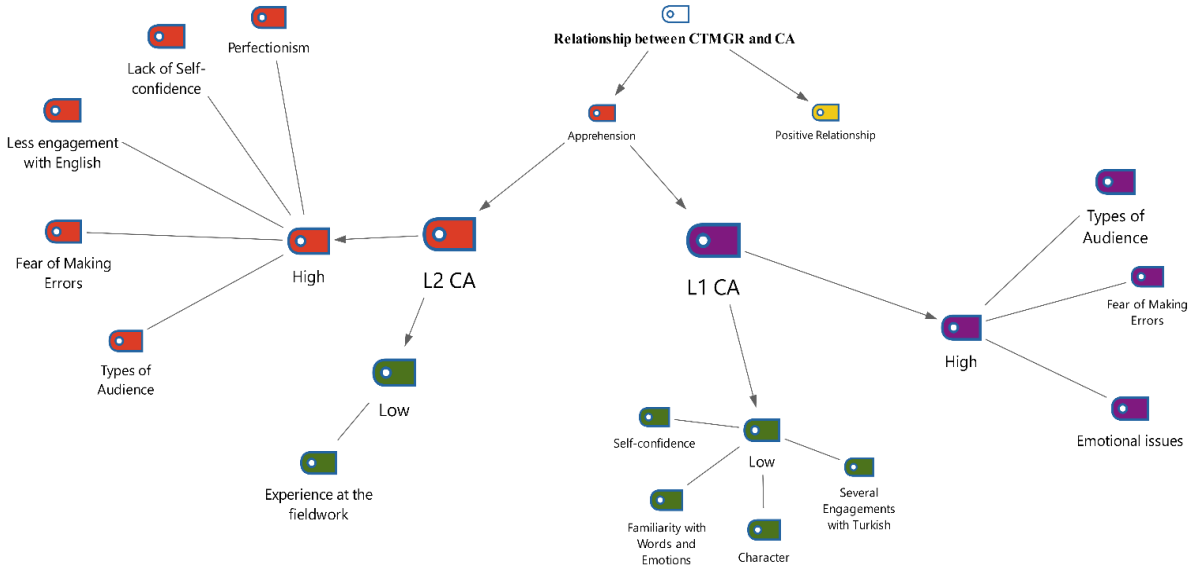
"The space it liberates is that you can do as you please. I mean, I'm a man, I'm a man, I do this. In this sense, it is something that liberates men" (Erkan)

"I can say it [traditional masculinity] makes men more confident. I mean, whatever they do is correct. You know, I can do it, I am a man, I can say whatever I want." (Erkan)

Relationship between CTMGR and L2 CA

Regarding the potential influence of CTMGR on male EFL learners' L2 CA levels, the interviewees were asked questions designed to explore the nature of the relationship between these two constructs. The aim was to unearth whether, and in what ways, the internalization of traditional masculine norms contributes to increased apprehension in English communicative settings. Figure 4 illustrates the organization of the findings into thematic categories and corresponding codes, which collectively capture participants' perceptions and interpretations of this intersection.

Figure 4. Visualization of the Relationship Between CTMGR and CA



The interviewees commonly expressed the perception that CTMGR operates as a triggering factor, exacerbating both L1 and L2 CA in male EFL learners, often deriving from similar underlying reasons. In particular, participants identified several key contributors to CA, including: 'audience type', 'fear of making mistakes', 'less engagement in English', 'low self-confidence', and 'perfectionist tendencies'. These key factors were frequently linked to internalized masculine norms that emphasize flawlessness, control, and dominance, which can be regarded as misalignment with the risk-taking and mistake-driven nature of L2 learning.

Specifically, participants stressed that the type of audience significantly influences the intensity of L2 CA among male learners valuing CTMGR. That is, CA tends to increase when the interlocutor is either female or perceived as a more proficient L2 speaker, suggesting that the social dynamics of gender and perceived competence shape oral L2 apprehension. Several participants elaborated on how interactions with members of the opposite sex, in particular, create discomfort and escalate reluctance to communicate, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

"When we look at masculinity norms, a traditional man is not very close to women. You know, when he tries to speak in such an environment, in an environment where women are present, he may experience greater difficulty or apprehension" (Osman)

"With the opposite sex, they may be concerned about speaking more politely, more modern, more appealing. I mean, you know, there is a woman in front of me, and I should speak accordingly. I should pay attention to word choices. Such thoughts are always in the background". (Umut)

"But only if the target interlocutor were a man, I would talk and speak fluently. I think there can be more anxiety and apprehension when we talk to the opposite sex." (Osman)

Regarding more proficient L2 speakers, one of the participants' statements is as follows:

"Now, since everyone in the class is studying ELT, and everyone has a good command of English, speaking in front of them is, of course, more anxious. I think I can speak much more fluently when I speak in front of someone who doesn't know English. Speaking in such an environment puts me under more stress." (Osman)

They also drew attention to the complex interplay among lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and perfectionist tendencies. In this respect, male EFL learners agreed that traditional masculine gender roles were perceived as perfectionists who strive to appear competent, accurate, and flawless. Due to the pressure to show agreement with the socially constructed conventional masculine gender roles, they often avoid situations where they might appear vulnerable or unsuccessful in front of others. However, since L2 learning involves a trial-and-error process, the inevitability of making mistakes in L2 settings seems to be a source of apprehension. Consequently, these individuals tend to avoid communicative risks in L2 interactions, further hampering their L2 self-confidence and exacerbating their CA. The following excerpts from participants' responses illustrate these views:

"If I make a mistake here, it could damage my masculine image. This prevents them from developing their speaking skills. At the same time, it is not only public speaking. In one-on-one conversations, some men get very upset when they make mistakes and become psychologically demoralized." (Edis)

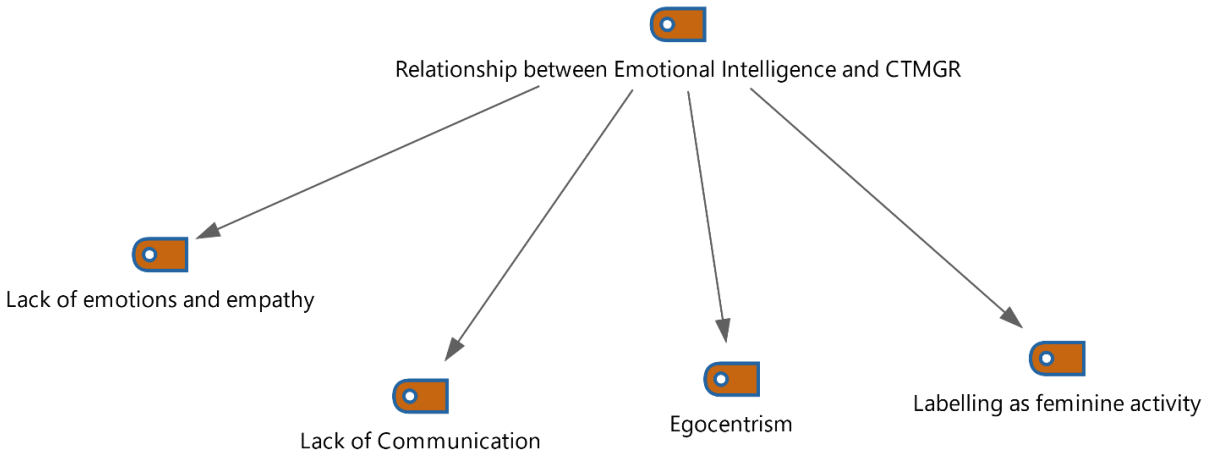
"We have the idea that we should speak better English, just like Turkish. Hımm like the more accurately we should speak it. I mean, we try to speak as flawlessly as possible, as fluently as possible, and with very appropriate expressions, very appropriate words. Well, we are trying to reach perfection." (Umut)

"This effort to show themselves [roles and norms] will actually increase their apprehension about speaking in English. In other words, it will create communication apprehension in them. In other words, there will be extra apprehension in English with the reflections of these norms". (Umut)

Relationship between CTMGR and EI

As for the effect(s) of CTMGR on male EFL students' emotionality, participants were invited to reflect on their perceptions of the relationship between these two constructs. As summarized in Figure 6 below, the findings are organized into thematic categories and corresponding codes, offering a visual representation of the key insights derived from the interviews.

Figure 5. Visualization of the relationship between EI and CTMGR



Most participants shared that CTMGR exerts a noticeably negative influence on men's EI and emotionality. They emphasized that traditional masculine role expectations diametrically contrast with EI's core dimensions, particularly empathy. In this regard, the reasons articulated by the interviewees were clustered around themes such as 'lack of emotions and empathy,' 'lack of communication,' 'egocentrism,' and 'labeling as feminine activity.' Participants commonly described men who show

excessive adherence to masculine norms as egocentric and emotionally distant, often avoiding empathic engagement. They also noted that emotional expressiveness is frequently labeled as a feminine trait, discouraging emotional disclosure and openness among these individuals. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate these perspectives:

"CTMGR is one of the reasons why men don't communicate or talk enough with their relatives or people they love and people they have emotional ties with. You know, not opening up to others due to those emotional norms. This prevents the development of emotional intelligence" (Edis)

"The level of empathy decreases as they feel these norms. So, there is a negative relationship because, as I said, they are more self-centered, and they try to impose their own ideas in social relationships. So, they don't think much about what the other person feels. They just say their own thoughts." (Mustafa)

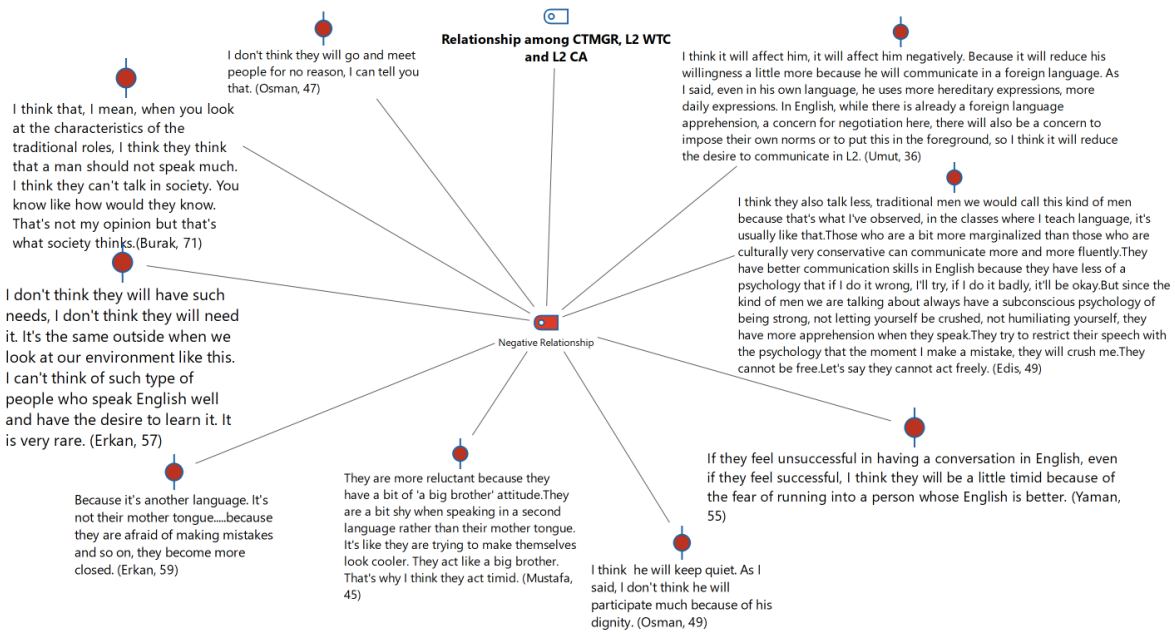
"But if you have such stereotypes and norms, you don't channel yourself into such emotional things because you find them partly feminine. You know, it is like. A man stays away from such things in order not to lose that masculinity, in order not to lose that masculine energy." (Edis)

"Traditionalism [masculinity] is something that dulls emotional intelligence because it is something that suppresses people, something that prevents them from showing their emotions, something that prevents them a little bit. Therefore, it will suppress emotional intelligence over time, maybe even completely eliminate it." (Erkan)

Relationships among CTMGR, L2 WTC and L2 CA

The interviewees were subsequently asked to share their views, insights, and interpretations on the interrelationships among adherence to masculine norms, L2 WTC, and L2 CA. The findings, categorized and coded based on thematic analysis, are presented in the figure below.

Figure 6. Visualization of the relationship among CTMGR, L2 WTC, and L2 CA



Regarding the intersections among CTMGR, L2 WTC, and L2 CA, participants commonly articulated that adherence to traditional masculine norms tends to inhibit men's willingness to engage

in L2 interaction, thus exacerbating their CA levels. As illustrated through the visualized quotations above, several underlying reasons were identified as contributing factors to lower L2 WTC and elevated L2 CA among male students who conform to CTMGR. Participants perceived these individuals as more likely to abstain from speaking or participating in conversations when there is a risk of making mistakes. Furthermore, the internalized pressure to 'maintain dominance in every context' was reported to lead such male students to avoid L2 communication out of fear of appearing flawed or incompetent. Additionally, participants noted that normative gender pressures often led these male learners to adopt a more reserved and less participatory engagement in L2 interactions. The following excerpt is an example perspective from the interviews:

"In fact, I would even say that, especially if you are just starting to learn the language, some of what I call the strict rules of masculinity can make it difficult for you to initiate L2 communication because this time it can lead to not being able to dominate the conversation. You cannot dominate the conversation and you show your comfort and I think they would prefer not to do that because it would cause discomfort." (Yaman)

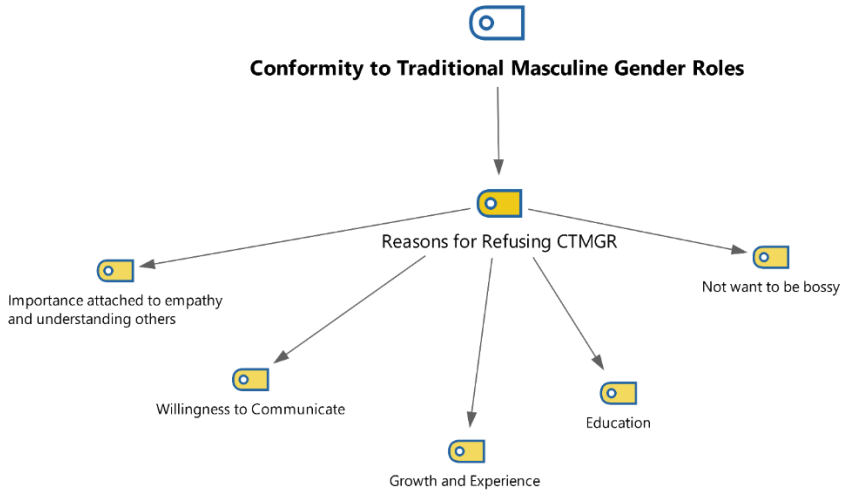
Moreover, the interviewees perceived L2 settings as spaces that are more welcoming to individuals who embrace diverse perspectives and marginalized mindsets, rather than those who are already occupied with traditional gender stereotypes. They also highlighted the role of empathy as a significant contributing factor that facilitates higher L2 WTC. In this regard, the participants' statements include the following:

"I actually think that empathy is something that develops as we establish communication. I think that the ability to empathize is actually related to the willingness to communicate. For this reason, I think that according to the frequency of communication, thinking about the other party in terms of empathy also develops gradually." (Umut)

Violation reasons of CTMGR

Finally, the participants were asked to self-assess their alignment with traditional masculine gender roles. Nearly all participants identified themselves as non-traditional men, explicitly rejecting CTMGR. Subsequently, they were invited to elaborate on the reasons behind their rejection of CTMGR. Figure 8 below presents the underlying reasons for this rejection, organized according to categories and corresponding codes.

Figure 7.Visualization of the violation reasons of CTMGR



The participants identified several reasons for their rejection of CTMGR, including the 'importance attached to empathy and understanding others,' 'willingness to communicate,' 'personal growth and experience,' 'education,' and 'resistance to being bossy.' They regarded CTMGR as a toxic and detrimental construct that restricts male EFL students' verbal production as well as their emotional expression skills. Given that many participants were either prospective or in-service English language teachers, they appeared to transcend traditional masculine roles, demonstrating an awareness of how these roles negatively affect their communicative skills and emotional abilities. In other words, they actively resisted these norms to a considerable extent.

The participants believed that studying in a language department or pursuing a career in language teaching facilitated this transcendence by enabling them to adopt a critical perspective, through which they could see and recognize the negative impacts of such traditional roles and norms on their verbal skills and emotional disclosure abilities. Consistent with these reflections, they attributed their resistance to the inherent nature of L2 learning and its nature. Furthermore, they emphasized that L2 learning challenges male students who value CTMGR to overcome stereotypical beliefs and behaviors if they aim to succeed. This success requires openness in sharing opinions, empathy, conversational skills, and a willingness to communicate. The following statements illustrate these perspectives:

"People I'm in contact with, the books I've read, I don't know, maybe social media accounts that I follow, that I value, whose opinions I care about. Then, the idea that I can evaluate the events from the other side's point of view. As a result of these things, I got rid of what we can call the traditional masculinity." (Mithat)

"Educated people are more open to such things, more open to innovations, and more able to approach such things. I think a big part of it comes from education, in my opinion." (Erkan)

"I am someone who is open to participating in communication as much as possible voluntarily. For this reason, I sometimes think about what the other party [person] thinks, what they feel, or what they might think in the expressions I use, what situation they are in, sometimes more than they speak. In fact, for this reason, I think our sense of empathy is a bit strong." (Umut)

"Probably with age and experience, it also changes in relation to the change of worldview and the development of perspective." (Mithat, 8)

"We always have proverbs and sayings like this: if a word is silver, silence is gold. We think that work is more important than talking, but talking is just as important as expressing yourself. We cannot express ourselves without talking or speaking." (Erkan)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This case study, derived from the qualitative phase of the first author's dissertation, employed one-on-one interviews to explore male EFL learners' views, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the potential effects of CTMGR on affective constructs, specifically EI, L2 WTC, and L2 CA. In this respect, the findings indicated that CTMGR appears to function as a significant constraint on both emotional expression and oral English production among Turkish male EFL learners. Crucial arguments can be drawn from the findings, which validate the current quantitative literature.

Considering the participants' views regarding traditional masculinity, it seems that Türkiye is a country where traditional masculinity is socially perpetuated through cultural dictates. This finding is also supported by various scholars (e.g., Kalkan & Odacı, 2017; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023; Kutuk et al., 2021), asserting that CTMGR is enacted through social and cultural expectations in Turkish culture. Though the participants viewed themselves as non-traditional men, they defined traditional masculinity through various conceptualizations, such as 'less talkative', 'free from

emotions', 'dominant', 'hard and tough', 'protective', 'patriarchal', 'leader', and 'selfish'. Various instruments in the current literature assessing traditional masculine gender roles and norms (e.g., Brannon & Juni, 1984; Mahalik et al., 2003; Thompson & Pleck, 1986) assess masculinity using such items. The findings point out that excessive alignment with these strict roles and norms could create major obstacles in some areas, such as talking, speaking freely, or being emotionally comfortable. Cultural implications can be highlighted for tight cultures, including Türkiye, where CTMGR is explicitly and implicitly perpetuated. As Chaffee et al. (2020a, p.14) suggested, "adopting more flexible societal gender roles may benefit not only women but also men".

Secondly, the findings offered valuable insights into the higher levels of L2 CA experienced by male EFL students with CTMGR, highlighting factors such as audience type, fear of error, low self-confidence, and perfectionism. These reasons are frequently addressed in several studies in EFL settings (e.g., Akkuş, 2021; Kuluşaklı & Genç, 2024; Şenel, 2012; Şener, 2014), arguing that certain types of audiences (talking to the opposite sex or an advanced L2 learner), the pressure not to make an error, lack of L2 confidence, or the perfectionistic views in L2 are regarded as main reasons leading to higher apprehension or anxiety in L2. Particularly, considering the traditional masculine norms dictating faultlessness, completeness, and superiority (Kankan & Odacı, 2017; Kantar, 2021; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023; Mahalik et al., 2003), it is no surprise that such male students feel higher L2 CA because these norms can be asserted to be diametrically opposed to the nature of L2 learning/settings (Kök & Kantar, 2023). Hence, psychoeducation programs can be developed around themes such as perfectionism, fear of making errors, and L2 self-confidence to help students overcome such affective issues (Kantar & Kök, 2025). Also, the employment of interactional activities where EFL learners find opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations with the help of drama, discussions, and role-plays can be additionally recommended because such activities create low-anxiety, learner-centered environments where EFL learners are encouraged to engage with the L2, create negotiation for meaning, and declare their personal viewpoints without excessive concern. In particular, drama-based tasks and role-plays allow learners to temporarily distance themselves from their real identities, which can alleviate fear of negative evaluation and reduce L2 apprehension.

Thirdly, lack of EI is associated with CTMGR, frequently criticized in terms of the barrier roles it plays to their empathy, understanding, communication performance, and allocentric behaviors, because society labels these issues as feminine acts. As Lorber and Garcia (2010) point out, men regard expressing emotions as a way of illustrating weakness and vulnerability. Pownall and Heflick (2023) also claim that men learn to eschew the events, phenomena, and situations culturally associated with femininity. Additionally, emotionality has been addressed as a construct to be hidden or avoided in the masculinity instruments (e.g., emotional control by Mahalik et al. 2003; emotional limitation by O'Neil et al. 1986; hiding their emotions by Brannon & Juni 1984; toughness by Thompson & Pleck 1986). Several studies further established a negative relationship among masculinity and empathy, self-compassion, emotional disclosure, and emotionality (e.g., Heath et al., 2017; Komiya et al., 2000; Kantar & Kök, 2025; Kök & Kantar, 2023; Mahalik & Burns, 2011). It could be suggested that implicit and explicit stereotypes like 'boys do not cry,' 'boys do not talk much,' or 'boys should be tough' can have detrimental effects on their verbal, oral, or linguistic performance as well as emotional disclosure skills. This culturally shaped schema limits men's performance, success, and interests in certain areas, such as L2 learning. In this sense, the development of EI in EFL settings calls for pedagogical attention because emotionally intelligent students are found to be facilitative and better L2 conversationalists, possessing more willingness to engage in communicative acts (Alavinia, 2012; Mehrpoor & Soleimani, 2018; Schutte et al., 2009; Tabatabaei & Jamshidifar, 2013; Toosy & Jajarmi, 2023; Öz, 2015). Given that the most prominent finding of this study concerns the restrictive impact of CTMGR on emotional expression, a key implication is the urgent need to design educational interventions that enhance male students' emotional awareness and expression skills. Such programs should also challenge the prevalent association of emotionality with femininity by promoting the understanding that emotional sensitivity, empathy, or strong interpersonal skills are not inherently linked to femininity, thus fostering greater emotional literacy and reducing gender-based emotional detachment in male individuals.

The diametrical opposition between the nature of L2 settings/learning and CTMGR was stressed, claiming that L2 settings are marginalized places for those who have violated, and to a greater extent, transcended these traditional, rigid, and inflexible roles. This accounts for why male students are undercounted in language departments or linguistic fields. As discussed by Asmalı (2020) and Chaffee et al. (2020b), female students outnumber in language-related fields. These could validate the finding that male students may be avoiding language-related areas to avoid violating and challenging the attributed norms of toughness, faultiness, and completeness. This could also be true, especially when considering L2 environments as places where "making mistakes and errors, showing tolerance to others, disclosure of feelings, mispronouncing sounds, creating wrong sentences, using more indirect acts, accepting the errors and correcting yourself" are quite common (Kök & Kantar, 2023, p.2). In other words, emotional openness, tolerance of errors, politeness, and interactions are essential in L2 settings, which may be seen as a departure from traditional masculine norms. In such situations, men experience discomfort when they are confronted with actions, events, or phenomena that are not attributed by society to their gender roles, which is called masculine gender role stress (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006). Therefore, if culture and society do not genderize talkativeness or stereotype foreign languages, male students can improve in these areas because, as Plante et al. (2013) asserted, gender-stereotypical thoughts and perceptions influence field-related outcomes. Furthermore, if culture and society attribute more humanized or green roles to men rather than pushing them into hard, tough, and dominant roles, the meanings attached to masculinity can be challenged, helping them live their lives less confined by CTMGR (Krivoshchekov et al., 2023). In other words, unless society and culture genderize emotional, linguistic, and verbal issues, men can find more spaces to improve their EI, empathy, talkativeness, tolerance, and emotional disclosure, without fear of being labeled *unmanly*.

Even though this study offers a context-sensitive qualitative understanding of how adherence to conventional masculine roles and norms intersects with male EFL learners' affective variables, such as EI, L2 WTC, and L2 CA, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Given its case study research design and reliance on a relatively small, purposively selected sample, the findings should be interpreted within the sociocultural context of Turkish EFL learners. In other words, the insights and interpretations should be viewed as exploratory; therefore, they should be approached cautiously within their contextual bounds. Also, the findings are based on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and participants' subjective interpretations of their experiences. Therefore, future research is encouraged to triangulate self-reported data to enhance the robustness of the findings.

SUGGESTIONS

To further build on these findings, future research is recommended to adopt an ethnographic research design, which could allow for broader perspectives and interpretations. Also, longitudinal studies are recommended to explore how CTMGR-related attitudes and behaviors evolve, and examine the temporal dynamics of CTMGR with its long-term effects on L2 affective variables, warranting empirical evidence of how they might continuously influence male EFL learners' affective engagement in EFL settings across more extended periods of time with more diverse populations. Such designs would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the enduring or shifting nature of CTMGR in L2 settings, which calls for pedagogical attention. Lastly, since this is the first qualitative inquiry into the relationship between masculinity and L2, more research is needed to explore the aforementioned dynamics in both tight and loose cultures.

The findings additionally underscore the necessity of implementing pedagogical programs or psychoeducation-based interventions addressed at mitigating male EFL learners' L2 CA and anxiety by prioritizing the development of affective variables such as emotional literacy and L2 WTC. Improving learners' socioemotional literacy can facilitate their interactional competence and intrapersonal awareness, enabling them to perceive, recognize, manage, and easily articulate their emotions and understand others' emotional states and feelings. This is essential for expressive skills in both L1 and L2. Furthermore, given that reduced verbal expressiveness, less talkativeness, and

emotional restrictiveness align with traditional masculine norms and roles, EFL learners should be consistently encouraged to engage in communicative tasks and classroom practices that require L2 oral production, both in and beyond the classroom.

Moreover, considering the core traits of traditional masculine roles, this underscores the importance of designing psychoeducation-based interventions in L2 environments that normalize vulnerability, mistake-making, emotional disclosure, and tolerance, which could be seen as traits that are often at odds with hegemonic masculine norms. Structured classroom activities, such as role-plays, peer or group discussions, and emotionally expressive L2 language tasks, should be intentionally incorporated to foster L2 WTC. Such practices can help balance the internalized norms of stoicism and dominance, providing male EFL learners with safer affective spaces to practice and grow, as longitudinal engagement with these pedagogies could promote linguistic gains and a critical reevaluation of rigid gender norms that hinder oral production.

Ethical Statement: This study, which is based on the first author's dissertation and supervised by the second author, was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Ethical committee approval for the study was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (Reference Number: E-84026528-050.01.04-2300063069).

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