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Social Emotional Learning in ELT Classrooms: Theoretical Foundations, Benefits, Implementation, and Challenges

Scott Smith

(*Graduate School of Education,Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea*)

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the effective utilization of social emotional learning (SEL) in English Language Teaching (ELT) environments. In other words, it will provide a comprehensive overview of the key components and offer practical guidance for teachers looking to implement SEL practices in their own unique teaching classrooms and situations. It starts by detailing the theoretical foundations or roots and importance of SEL, as well as the five core competencies (self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, social awareness, and self-awareness) and what each one means. After that, several key case studies are presented in an effort to underscore the positive impact of SEL on academic achievement. Following this, ways to implement SEL in ELT environments are showcased, to include preparation and planning, learning objectives, supportive classroom communities, teacher self-care, language teaching methodologies, instructional strategies and tools, curriculum design, lesson planning, materials selection and development, multimedia and technology, assessment, and reflective practice. To conclude, the need for continued research on effective SEL practices and its impacts on long-term student outcomes are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *humanistic psychology, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, social awareness, self-awareness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social emotional learning (SEL) refers to the process of acquiring and applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support the development of healthy social and emotional competencies, to includeself-management, responsible decision-making, positive relationships, and social awareness (Meyers, 2016). SEL is designed to help learners develop the ability to understand and manage their emotions, build successful relationships with others, make responsible decisions, and cope with challenges and stress effectively (Steiner & Perry, 2018). SEL is often integrated into educational programs and curricula, as it is believed to bolster not only the academic accomplishments of students but also their overall well-being and success in life (Roffey, 2014). For these reasons, SEL has become increasingly recognized as a vital component of education across the globe in recent years.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF SEL

SEL has its roots in the humanistic psychology movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which emphasized the importance of self-esteem and self-awareness in personal development (Gay, 2018). In the 1980s, researchers began to investigate the role of social and emotional skills in academic achievement and success in life (Barnhardt & Li, 2017). This research led to the development of various programs and interventions aimed at promoting SEL in schools and other educational settings. One of the most influential early programs was the "Resolving Conflict Creatively Program" (RCCP), which was developed in New York City(Wang &Degol, 2016). The RCCP was designed to teach students skills in conflict resolution, communication, and problem-solving. It has since been implemented in schools across the United States and internationally. In the late1990s, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded to promote SEL and develop standards and guidelines for these programs (Zins et al., 2004). CASEL's framework for SELincludes five core competencies: self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, social awareness, and self-awareness.

Clockwise through the Interactive CASELwheel above (casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/), self-management refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. It involves setting goals, managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself, as well as being able to adapt to changing circumstances and handle setbacks and challenges effectively.

Responsible decision-making means being able to make ethical and constructive choices based on consideration of all relevant factors, including one's own values and goals, social norms, and the potential impact of one's decisions on others. It involves identifying and evaluating alternative solutions to problems, anticipating and assessing consequences, and taking responsibility for one's decisions and the resulting outcomes.

Relationship skills involve the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with others – that is, building and maintaining trust, communicating effectively, cooperating and collaborating with others, and resolving conflicts in a constructive manner.

Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with others, especially their perspectives, emotions, and needs. It involves being able to effectively recognize and appreciate diversity, respect and value others' opinions and feelings, and navigate social norms and expectations.

Self-awareness involves the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior, which includes developing an accurate self-concept, understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, and being able to reflect on actions and experiences. (CASEL, 2020a; Osher et al., 2016; Brackett et al., 2012; Hattie, 2012; Schunk & Ertmer, 2000).

Today, SEL is increasingly recognized as an important component of education and is being embraced and implemented in schools and other educational settings around the world for several reasons: improved academic performance, positive social outcomes, personal development, increased focus on whole-child development, and workplace readiness (Gross, 2015).More specifically, SEL can help students develop the skills and attitudes necessary to succeed academically, such as engagement, motivation, participation, and self-discipline/management. (Jones et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011; Lopes et al., 2004). SEL can also enhance students' interpersonal skills, including communication, collaboration, and empathy (Durlak et al., 2011; Mayor & Salovey, 1997). Additionally, SEL can help improve students' mental health and wellbeing, by providing them with the tools to manage stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions (Moberly & Thomas, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011). Furthermore, SEL can help students develop the cultural competence necessary to navigate diverse social contexts and interact effectively with people from different backgrounds (Gay, 2018; Merrill, 2016). Finally, SEL can help prepare students for future success, to include education, work, personal relationships, and society at large (Darling-Hammond & Ifill, 2019).

III. POSITIVE IMPACTS OF SEL

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of SEL on academic achievement. Among them, Taylor (2017) determined that SEL programs improved students' academic achievement, with the greatest impact on reading. Sklad (2012) found that SEL programs had a positive impact on students' academic performance in writing. Bierman (2010) detected that an SEL program led to noticeable gains in vocabulary. And Newman & Dusenbury (2015) revealed that SEL programs led to significant improvements in all three of these areasplus mathematics.

In terms of specific skills, SEL can also enhance students' interpersonal skills, which are important for success both in and outside the classroom (Kassim & Ali, 2014). To illustrate, Brackett (2012) found that students who participated in an SEL program showed significant improvements in their social skills, including empathy and perspective-taking. Similarly, a study by Noddings (2005) found that SEL can promote caring relationships between students and teachers, leading to a more positive learning environment. SEL also has a positive impact on students' mental health and wellbeing. For example, a study by Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) found that students who participated in a SEL program showed reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Similarly, a study by Flook(2015) found that mindfulness-based SEL programs can reduce symptoms of stress and improve attention and self-regulation. As mentioned earlier, SEL can also help students develop the cultural competence necessary to interact effectively with people from different backgrounds. For example, a study by Gay (2018) found that incorporating SEL can promote students' cultural competence by helping them develop an awareness and understanding of their own cultural backgrounds and those of others. This can lead to improved communication and collaboration skills, as well as a greater appreciation for diversity. All of this holds true for both traditional classrooms and ELT settings.

IV: IMPLEMENTING SEL IN ELT

In order to effectively incorporate SEL into ELT, it is important for teachers to learn about and possibly receive training in SEL strategies and techniques. This can include reading key literature in the field, attending workshops or training sessions, and/or participating in online courses or webinars. Teachers who are then knowledgeable about SEL can start creating supportive and positive learning environments, which can enhance students' academic and social-emotional outcomes (Brackett, 2012; Pekrun, 2006).

One key aspect,and an obvious place to start,is preparation and planning. Towards this end, SEL teachers need to consider the individual and collective needs of their students, and tailor their instruction and activities accordingly. Moreover, they need to take in to account factors such as cultural background, learning styles, and developmental stage (Johnson et al., 2019). From here, teachers must assemble an evidence-based SEL curriculum that aligns with their learning objectives and meets the needs of students, to include ensuring that it is age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and engaging. Beyond that, choosing instructional strategies that promote active engagement, collaboration, and reflection are essential, which involves using a variety of modalities, including visual aids, group discussions, and role-playing (Li et al., 2020). The classroom environment is yet another critical component, wherein teachers can create a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere that promotes SEL via positive interactions, clear expectations and routines, and opportunities for choice and autonomy (Greenberg et al., 2013). Assessment and feedback are undeniably important, which necessitates a system for evaluation and support for student progress (e.g. formative assessment, self-assessment, peer feedback, and teacher feedback) (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, professional development helps ensure that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to effectively teach SEL over the long term (Conderman & Johnston, 2018). Finally, family and community engagement are essential they both openly encourage direct communication and collaboration to support students' social and emotional development (Cefai, 2018).

An important part of planning and preparation is thinking about possible student learning objectives. These can, again, include self-awareness (to include emotions, thoughts, strengths, and areas for growth), self-regulation (in healthy and effective ways), social awareness (or recognition and understanding of the experiences and perspectives of others), relationship skills (which involves effective communication, active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution), responsible decision-making (that necessitates making thoughtful and ethical choices based on personal values), mindfulness (i.e. being present in the moment, non-judgmental, and aware of one's thoughts and feelings), growth mindset (or the understanding that one's abilities and intelligence can be developed through hard work, persistence, and learning from mistakes), and character development (which includes traits like honesty, respect, responsibility, and compassion, and an understanding of how to apply these values in one's daily life) (Bryant et al., 2019; Alsup & Spriggs, 2016; Elias & Arnold, 2006).

Another part of planning and preparation is thinking about how to create a successful classroom community that is safe, supportive, and nurturing – one where students feel valued and respected. This requires establishing clear expectations for behavior and communication in the classroom, and ensuring that all students

understand the expectations and consequences for violating them (Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, teachers need to foster a positive learning environment that helps celebrate successes and supports students through any and all challenges. Building strong relationships based on trust and respect is also important, to include being tuned in, getting to know students as individuals, and showing interest in their lives outside of school (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Additionally, teachers need to encourage open communication in the classroom by creating opportunities for students to share their thoughts and feelings (Zins et al., 2004). Furthermore, teachers need to use activities that encourage students to share and listen actively to their peers. Promoting diversity and inclusion by celebrating differences and creating a welcoming environment for all students is yet another key aspect (Morgan &Sideridis, 2020). Explicitly teaching social and emotional skills via role-playing, discussion, reflection activities, etc. is vital too. Finally, modeling positive behaviors and attitudes in their interactions with students by showing respect, empathy, and kindness in interactions is undeniably important (Kao & Lam, 2017).

Teachers who work in SEL classrooms are often called upon to provide additional support to students and are therefore at risk of experiencing burnout. In other words, practicing self-care is essential for teachers in SEL classrooms to maintain their own emotional well-being and to be able to provide the best support possible for students (Miller et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2019; Fredrickson, 2013; Collie et al., 2012). In addition to being mindful of his before setting foot in the classroom, teachers need to carefully consider the importance of taking breaks throughout the day to recharge their batteries, whether it's in the form of stretching, meditating, or simply stepping outside for some type of refreshment. Teachers should also set clear boundaries to prevent themselves from becoming overwhelmed, to include learning to say "no" when necessary and prioritize self-care through activities like exercise, hobbies, spending time with loved ones, and/or anything that helps with rejuvenation. Seeking support by connecting with colleagues is also essential. Taking advantage of professional development opportunities to learn new strategies and techniques to support students is another helpful avenue as it can help teachers feel more confident in their ability to handle challenging situations. Finally, ongoing self-reflection can help teachers identify areas of strength and areas for improvement (i.e. identify what is and is not working).

Language teaching methodologies are another important part of implementation. Towards this end, it's important to choose approaches that are appropriate for the developmental stage and needs of the students. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a clear choice in this regard as it emphasizes the importance of meaningful communication in language learning, to include promoting social and emotional skills such ascollaboration and empathy. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is another obvious choice as it involves students completing tasks that require them to use language in authentic, real-world situations, which can help students with problem-solving, decision-making, and critical thinking. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a third possibility as it buttresses learners' ability to process input, which helps prepare them for higher-level thinking skills and enhances cognitive development(Siouta et al., 2021).

In addition to methodologies, there are various instructional strategies and tools that can be effective in the SEL classroom. One is cooperative learning, which involves students working together in small groups to accomplish shared goals or complete tasks, wherein each member's success is dependent on the group's success. Role-playing can also be useful as acting out a scenario or situationcan help students make sense of a real-life situation, explore, investigate, experiment, and compromise with one another in creative and imaginative ways, recognize and respond to others' feelings, and potentially engage insupportive conflict resolution. Keeping a journal is yet another possibility as it helps students record their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and, through this reflective process, develop self-awareness, self-regulation, and compassion. Project-based learning is another excellent option as it requires students to work together on (long-term)assignmentsthat necessitate collaboration, critical thinking skills, and ongoing discussions and support (Arnau & Hernandez, 2017).

Another important aspect of implementing SEL in ELT is designing a curriculum that includes opportunities for students to develop their social-emotional skills. This requires careful planning and consideration of the specific needs and goals of learners, to include identifying the specific SEL competencies to be addressed, developing learning objectives for each one (which should be specific, measurable, and aligned with the desired outcomes), choosing instructional strategies and activities that are most appropriate for the learners' needs and goals, developing materials and resources that support all instructional strategies and activities, incorporating ongoing assessment and evaluation to help ensure that learners are achieving the desired learning objectives (Payton et al., 2008). This may involve formative assessments throughoutanda summative assessment at the end, providing support and resources for application in order to help learners apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in real-world situations, and implementation and refinement, to include adjusting instructional strategies and activities, modifying learning objectives, or updating materials and resources based on learner needs and feedback (Schunk & Ertmer, 2000).

Once the curriculum has been established, attention can shift to lesson planning. To help ensure success in this area (beyond Identifying key learning objectives and careful, coherent sequencing), consider the context and environment in terms of student needs and interests, to include creating a safe and supportive learning environment that fosters social and emotional growth. Also, choose activities and tasks that are appropriate for

the age and developmental level of the students, as well as those that are engaging, interactive, and relevant to the targeted skills (e.g. mindfulness exercises, social skill-building scenarios, character education situations, etc.). Moreover, at the end of each lesson, provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and progress, and provide opportunities for self-assessment and goal setting. Throughout, teachers need to be mindful of diversity and inclusion (i.e. consider how different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences may influence students' social and emotional development and design activities that are inclusive for these). Moreover, they need to try to integrate SEL with academic content by, for example, teaching social skills through literatureor by utilizing history lessons to teach empathy and perspective-taking, and collaborating with colleagues and seeking feedback, which will help develop and improve SEL lesson plans (Aslan, 2018).

Materials design and development is another key area to consider for SEL. First, identify the specific SEL skills you want to target. Then, conduct research on existing SEL programs, materials, and resources, which will help identify best practices and determine what has worked well for other educators. Next, develop clear and measurable learning objectives in an effort to ensure that materials are aligned with stated goals and objectives. After that, it's important to choose appropriate materials, specifically those that are appropriate for the age and developmental level of the students, as well as interesting, motivating, and fun. Also, materials need to be inclusive and culturally responsive, which will require carefully thinking about the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the students and incorporating materials that reflect and respect this diversity. Finally, feedback and refinement to ensure effectiveness and relevance is essential, to include making any and alladjustments as necessary (Eccles & Roeser, 2009).

Multimedia and technology can certainly play a significant role in the SEL classroom by enhancing students' engagement and learning experiences. Digital storytelling is one option and a powerful tool for promoting empathy and perspective-taking as students can create narratives to explore and express their own emotions and experiences, as well as gain understanding of the emotions and experiences of others. There are also many online resources and tools that can support SEL instruction, such as videos, podcasts, social media platforms, and mobile applications. Additionally, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can provide students with immersive and interactive experiences that simulate real-world social and emotional situations, which will help them to develop empathy, perspective-taking, and problem-solving skills. Finally, data tracking and analysis technology can be used to trace and analyze students' social and emotional development over time, which can help educators to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and adjust instruction accordingly.

As noted earlier, assessment and evaluation are also important components of incorporating SEL into ELT. Teachers can use a variety of methods to measure students' learning in this regard, such as self-assessments, peer evaluations, and/or teacher observations. All of these can help provide students with feedback on their current progress, get them to regularly reflect on the status of their own learning, and set goals for future improvement (Brackett, 2012; Durlak, 2011). To assess and evaluate effectively, teachers will need to first identify the specific SEL competencies to be assessed – ones that are most relevant to the students' needs and goals – and then clearly communicate these to them.At some point, it will be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation, which can be accomplished by tracking student progress over time and assessing the impact of SEL on language proficiency and overall academic performance (Valencia, 2010). The end goal is to help students take ownership of their own development and motivate them to continue developing and improving their SEL skills.

Reflective teaching and practice (i.e. thinking deeply about what worked well in each lesson and a course, what could be improved, and how to plan in the future) is clearly important for the SEL classroom because it helps educators to continually evaluate and improve their teaching practices to better support students' social and emotional development. Specifically, reflection will enhance self-awareness about beliefs, biases, and emotions, which in turn can help teachers to better understand and support their students' social and emotional development (Lyons &Pekrun, 2010). It can also help improve instructional practices and make adjustments that better support students' social and emotional needs. And, ultimately, reflection helps educators to build positive relationships with their students by better understanding their social and emotional needs, which results in a more supportive and engaging learning environment that fosters students' social and emotional growth (Moustafa et al., 2017).

Below are some key questions that teachers could ask themselves:

- What specific social and emotional skills were targeted in the lesson and/or course, and how were they integrated into the instruction?
- How did the students respond to the lesson? Were there any observable changes in their behavior or attitudes?
- Did the lesson and/or course promote a sense of community and belonging in the classroom? If so, how?

- Were there any instances of conflict or emotional distress during the lesson and/or course, and if so, how were they addressed?
- What could have been done differently to better support students' social and emotional learning?
- Were all students engaged in the lesson and/or course? If not, what adjustments could be made to better engage all students?
- How did the lesson align with the larger social and emotional goals of the class or curriculum?
- Were there any specific students who struggled with the content or activities in the lesson and/or course, and if so, how can they be better supported in the future?
- Did the lesson and/or course provide opportunities for students to practice skills such as communication, collaboration, and empathy?
- How can the lessons learned from this reflection be applied to future lessons and instruction to further promote students' social and emotional growth?

V. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Obviously, there are several challenges associated with implementing SEL in ELT. These include limited time to address both language learning and SEL competencies, which can be especially tough for teachers who are working within a standardized curriculum and/or are facing pressure to prepare students for standardized assessments (Roffey, 2012). Additionally, teachers may not have the necessary training or resources to effectively implement SEL in their ELT classrooms, making it difficult to know how to effectively teach SEL competencies or integrate them into an existing ELT curriculum (Ryan & Deci, 2012). To add to this, studentsmay not initially see the value of SEL competencies or may not be motivated to develop their social emotional skills (Guo et al., 2018). Moreover, students may struggle to understand the language used to teach SEL competencies, which can make it difficult for teachers to effectively communicate the concepts and skills associated with SEL (Kazdin, 2011). Students from different cultural backgrounds may also have different values, beliefs, and social norms that affect how they understand and respond to SEL instruction, which can make it complicated for teachers to effectively tailor SEL instruction to meet the needs and expectations of all students (Benner & Nelson, 2018).

Despite these formidable obstacles, implementing SEL in ELT can be beneficial for students' academic success and social-emotional development. Teachers can overcome them by seeking out professional development opportunities, using evidence-based SEL resources, and involving students in the SEL implementation process to increase their engagement and motivation (Lee et al., 2020).

Moreover, there are several promising avenues for future research and development in SEL in ELT. One potential area is the use of technology to support SEL learning, such as incorporating digital games or social media platforms into language teaching activities (Kassim & Ali, 2014). Another possibility is the integration of community-based or service-learning projects into language teaching, which can provide opportunities for students to apply their social-emotional skills in real-world contexts (Brackett et al., 2012). Additionally, research on the effectiveness of specific SEL strategies or programs in ELT can provide valuable insights into best practices for incorporating social-emotional learning into language teaching practice (Goleman, 2011).

Undoubtedly, SEL is becoming increasingly important in education as teachers recognize the importance of developing students' social and emotional skills alongside traditional academic skills. In the future, SEL will likely play an even greater role in ELT as educators continue to explore innovative ways to promote students' social and emotional development. Some possible trends include greater integration of SEL into ELT curriculums, which may involve the development of new materials and resources that explicitly incorporate SEL competencies into language learning activities (Durlak et al., 2011). There will also be more emphasis on technology based-approaches, to include online resources that can help students develop their SEL skills, such as gamified apps and online coaching tools (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Additionally, as SEL becomes more important in ELT, we can expect to see a greater emphasis on teacher training and professional development as teachers will need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively integrate SEL into their ELT instruction and to provide effective feedback and coaching to students on their social and emotional development (Pekrun et al., 2009). And, as SEL becomes more widely adopted in ELT, we can expect to see more research on its impact on student learning outcomes, including language proficiency and social and emotional development, which will help to guide future SEL implementation efforts and ensure that students are receiving the best possible education (Damasio, 2018).

VI: CONCLUSION

Overall, the incorporation of SEL in ELT can provide numerous benefits for students, including increased academic achievement, enhanced interpersonal skills, and improved mental health and wellbeing. Effective implementation of SEL in ELT requires teacher training, curriculum design, and assessment and

evaluation strategies. While there are challenges associated with incorporating SEL in ELT, future research and development in this area hold promise for improving language learning and teaching outcomes.

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