

10. Empathy and Resilience in Action: Integrating Social-Emotional Learning in ESL Classrooms¹

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Abstract

This study looks at how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) techniques help English Language Learners (ELLs) become more resilient and empathetic. This study used a Convergent Mixed Methods design, collecting qualitative data through teacher focus groups and classroom observations and quantitative data through pre- and post-surveys. Eight English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers from the United States and 120 English Language Learners (ELLs) make up the participants. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasize the significance of social interactions for children's emotional and cognitive development, served as the study's guiding theories. Qualitative analysis revealed improved teacher-student relationships and increased emotional engagement in the classroom, while the results showed a statistically significant increase in empathy and resilience for students after the intervention. In actuality, SEL integration improved classroom dynamics and created a supportive learning environment for ESL instruction. These results support the idea that SEL techniques are essential to ELLs' overall development, enhancing both their academic performance and emotional health. Targeted teacher training and the inclusion of SEL practices in the curriculum are two suggestions made in this regard.

Keywords: Social-emotional learning, empathy, resilience, English language learners

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Eylemde Empati ve Dayanıklılık: İkinci Dil olarak İngilizce Sınıflarında Sosyal-Duygusal Öğrenmeyi Entegre Etmek⁴

Öz

Bu çalışma, Sosyal-Duygusal Öğrenme (SEL) tekniklerinin İngilizce Öğrenenlerin (ELL'ler) daha dayanıklı ve empatik olmalarına nasıl yardımcı olduğunu incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, öğretmen odaklı grupları ve sınıf gözlemleri aracılığıyla nitel verileri ve ön ve son anketler aracılığıyla nicel verileri toplayan Yakınsak Karma Yöntemler tasarımı kullanmıştır. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden sekiz İngilizceyi İkinci Dil Olarak Öğrenme (ESL) öğretmeni ve 120 İngilizce Öğrenen (ELL'ler) katılımcıları oluşturmaktadır. Çocukların duygusal ve bilişsel gelişimi için sosyal etkileşimlerin önemini vurgulayan Vygotsky'nin Sosyokültürel Teorisi ve Bandura'nın Sosyal Öğrenme Teorisi, çalışmanın yol gösterici teorileri olarak hizmet etmiştir. Nitel analiz, öğretmen-öğrenci ilişkilerinde iyileşme ve sınıfta artan duygusal katılım ortaya koyarken, sonuçlar müdahaleden sonra öğrencilerde empati ve dayanıklılıkta istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir artış olduğunu göstermiştir. Gerçekte, SEL entegrasyonu sınıf dinamiklerini iyileştirmiş ve ESL eğitimi için destekleyici bir öğrenme ortamı yaratmıştır. Bu sonuçlar, SEL tekniklerinin ELL'lerin genel gelişimi için gerekli olduğu ve hem akademik performanslarını hem de duygusal sağlıklarını iyileştirdiği fikrini desteklemektedir. Bu bağlamda, hedef odaklı öğretmen eğitimi ve SEL uygulamalarının müfredata dahil edilmesi iki öneridir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyal-duygusal öğrenme, empati, dayanıklılık, İngilizce öğrenenler

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Introduction

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a crucial element in modern educational frameworks, focusing on equipping students with essential competencies to navigate their emotions, relationships, and decision-making processes. SEL encompasses the development of skills that enable individuals to identify and manage their emotions, demonstrate empathy toward others, establish meaningful relationships, and make responsible choices. The integration of SEL into educational settings is supported by substantial empirical evidence indicating that these skills foster academic success, emotional well-being, and positive social interactions among students (Brackett et al., 2012; , Mahoney et al., 2021; , Durlak et al., 2022).

Recent advancements in SEL research highlight its broad applicability across developmental stages, from early childhood through adolescence. Programs designed to enhance SEL, such as those outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), have demonstrated effectiveness in improving classroom behavior, social skills, and academic performance (Blewitt et al., 2018; , Mahoney et al., 2021; , Durlak et al., 2022). Specifically, a systematic review noted that children participating in universal SEL curricula exhibited significant gains in social competence, emotional regulation, and overall positive behaviors, while also decreasing incidences of behavioral problems (Blewitt et al., 2018; , Durlak et al., 2022). The CASEL framework categorizes SEL into five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Green et al., 2021; , Sande et al., 2019).

A pivotal distinction within SEL is the differentiation between SEL as a general concept and the specific framework provided by CASEL, which acts as a guiding structure for implementing SEL in educational contexts. While SEL broadly refers to the process of developing social-emotional skills, CASEL offers a structured approach to defining and assessing these competencies, thereby providing educators with a coherent strategy for instruction and advocacy at both the classroom and policy levels (Cavioni et al., 2024; , (Forber-Pratt et al., 2023). The CASEL framework emphasizes evidence-based practices and the importance of integrating SEL into the overall educational experience rather than relegating it to isolated lessons (Lawson et al., 2018).

Moreover, the ongoing evolution of SEL practices has involved adaptations to contemporary educational challenges, such as those posed by inequity and the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting discussions around transformative SEL. This approach incorporates elements aimed at addressing systemic inequities within the educational system, fostering an environment where students can critically analyze societal issues and engage in collaborative problem-solving (Forber-Pratt et al., 2023). The emphasis on transformative SEL underlines the necessity for SEL frameworks like CASEL to adapt to changing socio-cultural contexts while retaining their core competencies.

In conclusion, the increasing emphasis on social-emotional learning recognizes its critical role in shaping well-rounded individuals prepared for the complexities of modern society. The differentiation provided by the CASEL framework enhances the clarity and implementability of SEL initiatives in educational settings, thus supporting educators in fostering environments that promote holistic student development. The integration of SEL into English Language Learning (ELL) instruction is still largely unexplored, despite the fact that it is widely used at various educational levels. Language barriers, cultural adjustment, and emotional distress are among the unique difficulties faced by ELLs, all of which are related to social and academic survival. Consequently, teaching should incorporate elements of

social and emotional development in addition to cognitive learning.

ELLs continue to emerge as an increasing population in schools today, not only in developed countries but also in the United States alone, where 10.4% of K-12 students are classified as ELLs. Many are from culturally and linguistically diversified backgrounds, adding more complexity to the nature of their own learning processes. These obstacles frequently result in increased levels of stress, anxiety, and even loneliness, especially when combined with the strain and stress that comes with learning a new language. Because of this, ELLs are particularly vulnerable to social-emotional problems like anxiety, low self-esteem, and trouble forming relationships with their peers. SEL seems like a promising answer to these problems. SEL interventions have been shown to have an impact on students' emotional well-being, social-emotional learning, and academic achievement. Despite these obvious benefits derivable from SEL, nevertheless, its application is relatively unexplored in the context of ELL teaching. Given the specialized needs that ELLs have, the infusion of SEL into ESL curricula may provide critical support in terms of the academic progress and emotional wellbeing of students who are labeled as ELLs (Elias et al., 2015).

This research was essentially informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks, Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which basically explain the role of social interaction and relevant environmental factors in cognitive and emotional development, thereby making them very applicable to the study of SEL in ELL contexts.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn certain behaviors, attitudes, and emotions through observation of others' behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. According to Bandura, learning is a social process whereby individuals acquire knowledge and skills through interacting with the environment, especially through observation of peers, teachers, and other role models, a process known as vicarious learning or observational learning. That is, in the classroom setting, Bandura's theory argues that through the process of observation of teachers and peers and engaging in positive social contacts, students can build some very critical social-emotional skills such as empathy and resilience. In fact, ELLs are likely to learn from contexts where teachers and classmates model and reinforce social-emotional competencies, internalize them, and replicate them in their own social interactions.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) extends Bandura's work even further and emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in the overall process of cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learning is a socially mediated process that takes place within the "zone of proximal development" wherein learners, guided by more knowledgeable others-such as teachers or peers-reach a higher level of understanding than what they would have managed alone (Vygotsky, 1978). What this would imply in SEL is that students could build social-emotional competencies through scaffolded interactions with instructors and peers who model appropriate social behaviors and provide feedback. For ELLs, these interactions become highly crucial, given that they are still primarily based on social cues and cultural norms as a way of navigating new environments and building relationships (Thorne & Lantolf, 2006). This integration of SEL within ESL instruction allows the instructor to afford opportunities for ELLs to engage in meaningful social interactions that will facilitate emotional development and cultural adjustment.

This study is informed by an increasing recognition of the importance of SEL to promote student success, coupled with particular challenges faced by ELLs. Although many previous studies have established benefits pertaining to social-emotional learning in general education settings, few works

have been conducted about its specific impacts on ELLs, mainly in developing empathy and resilience. With the increasing diversity of students and ELLs, an emerging priority is to examine ways SEL might be integrated into ESL instruction as one means of holistically supporting such students.

Two especially important social-emotional competencies are those concerning empathy and resilience. Empathy is a way to understand and share other people's feelings. An empathetic approach helps create positive relationships and develops a sense of community in the classroom itself. As stated by Zaki (2014), it works this way. Indeed, through developing empathy, ELLs, who may struggle with feelings of isolation or cultural disconnection, are better prepared to relate to their peers and navigate social challenges. Similarly, in light of setbacks related to a new language and a new cultural environment, resilience, or the ability to recover and adequately adapt to challenges, becomes critical for ELLs. In this sense, SEL strategies that allow developing such competencies will enable ELLs to rise above academic and social challenges and prosper in their new learning settings.

Literature Review

The use of SEL techniques in educational settings to support English Language Learners has gained increasing attention in recent years. The literature review that follows summarizes important research findings in three main areas: the theoretical foundation of SEL, how SEL affects empathy and resilience, and the needs and difficulties that ELLs encounter in this setting.

SEL is founded on a number of educational and psychological theories that highlight the importance of social-emotional skills in guaranteeing student achievement. One fundamental framework for characterizing and defining SEL is offered by Goleman's model of emotional intelligence. The five components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, according to Goleman (1995). It is a set of competencies which plays an important role in the life of a student since, other than taking effect in his academic performance, it will affect his interpersonal relations.

The Social Learning Theory, initially presented by Bandura in 1977, is another significant theoretical framework that supports SEL. This theory holds that learning, including the development of social-emotional skills, is primarily an imitation, modeling, and observational process. Bandura's contribution highlighted how the social environment influences individual behaviors. Accordingly, he recommends that students learn social-emotional competencies by watching their peers and teachers engage in prosocial behavior.

Further, Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1986) loans a voice to SEL from an ecological perspective through the different layers of influence in child development. This theory postulates that family, school, community, and culture interactively bring forth either the hindrance or fostering of a child's social and emotional learning processes. This is an ecological perspective that particularly pertains to ELLs, who often negotiate complicated cultural and linguistic contexts.

Probably the most widely accepted framework for SEL was proposed by CASEL, which outlined five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. This gives a more structured approach to the delivery of SEL in schools, which helps educators to develop these competencies in students.

Research has consistently shown that SEL interventions help students become more resilient and

empathetic. More than 200 studies about SEL programs were examined in Durlak et al. (2011)'s meta-analyses; students in these studies who received SEL interventions showed notable gains in their academic performance, attitudes, behaviors, and social-emotional skills. The review emphasized SEL's transformative potential to improve empathy and resilience, two of the most critical skills for student success. Empathy is better defined as the ability to understand and share feelings of others. It thus provides a very important basis for positive social interactions and relationships. Eisenberg and Miller (1987) note that individuals who are empathetic are much more willing to help their peers and share with them. Indeed, SEL programs have been found to increase students' empathy by providing structured activities through which students can take others' perspectives and express their emotions. For instance, the study by Jones et al. (2013) indicated that the students that received SEL scored higher in empathy than the students who did not receive SEL training.

In this context, resilience refers to an individual's capacity to withstand and overcome adversity. Studies show that SEL programs improve resilience by assisting students in developing coping mechanisms and self-control. According to a Parker et al. (2004) study, students who participated in SEL training demonstrated greater resilience and improved academic performance when compared to students who did not participate in any such training programs. The development of positive relationships within peer and adult networks, a support system that students can rely on when needed, is actually how SEL increases resilience, according to Wang et al. (2019).

Research also underlines that embedding SEL within the curriculum is important to realize its full potential in bringing about positive effects on empathy and resilience. For example, Bennett et al. (2018) identify that when SEL is conducted within academic content areas, this will create a more connected learning experience where students can try out empathy and resilience within ecologically relevant validity. This embedment helps in improving not only social-emotional competencies but also enhancing academic engagement and achievement among students.

The very specific challenges of ELLs create the need for an intentional review of the strategies for SEL which can be particularly fitted to their needs. A lot of ELLs have to overcome a language gap, cultural differences, and social isolation—all factors that might interfere with their social-emotional development. Research has verified that one of the groups that most especially benefits from SEL involves the creation of supportive classroom settings and positive peer relationships.

Cultural responsiveness is a key factor to take into account when implementing SEL strategies for English Language Learners. The significance of culturally relevant pedagogy—which not only recognizes and values students' cultural backgrounds but also does so in a way that guarantees such recognition promotes academic success—has been emphasized by research by Gay (2018). In addition to helping ELLs develop their social-emotional skills, culturally responsive SEL programs would assist them in overcoming the difficulties of adjusting to a new cultural setting.

In fact, research has demonstrated that culturally adapted SEL interventions can yield significant enhancement in the social-emotional competencies of ELLs. Using a culturally responsive SEL curriculum, for instance, Vasquez et al. (2016) reported that those ELL students receiving the program demonstrated increased empathy and resiliency compared with peers receiving only traditional language instruction. These findings support the idea that when SEL practices are combined in a way that is consonant with the lives and experiences of students, they are more likely to connect with students and produce authentic social-emotional learning.

Moreover, SEL interventions can aid ELLs in making friends among their peers and teachers and hence help them build a sense of belonging in the classroom. In this regard, Orosco and O'Connor (2014) noted that strategies employed in SEL ensure that students engage each other constructively and would hence allow ELLs to develop a feeling of closeness towards their peers. This is invaluable for ELLs as they may experience isolation or be marginalized in a new learning environment. Additionally, the integration of SEL into language teaching can also aid in supplementing language development in ELLs. According to Zins et al. (2004), social-emotional skills are encompassed in language learning because students have to engage with others socially to get chances to use their language. By supporting social-emotional learning, teachers make available a supportive setting where ELLs feel more open to taking various linguistic risks, which, in turn, leads to better language acquisition.

The attempt to implement SEL for ELLs may encounter certain obstacles, despite its potential benefits. The first is the dearth of professional training regarding the integration of strategies into language instruction. Well-designed training programs are necessary to prepare teachers for the SEL program's implementation, claim Weissberg et al. (2015). Insufficient training may prevent teachers from offering SEL materials and adapting to the needs of their English Language Learners.

Moreover, other complications in the implementation of the case of SEL pertain to cultural and linguistic diversity among ELLs. Vaughn et al. (2015) explain that ELLs come from a number of diverse cultural backgrounds with their own values and beliefs concerning expressions in social and emotional contexts. For instance, teachers have to be sensitive to such issues and make sure that the strategies used in SEL are nondiscriminatory and respectful of students' diversified cultural standpoints. This will take great collaboration and communication between teacher and students for their protection and support in a safe environment conducive to learning.

In addition, ELLs might have other emotional issues nestled in the process of acquiring the language. Lee et al. (2014) mentioned that other common struggles among ELLs when dealing with a new language are anxiety and frustration, which may interfere with the possibility of engaging in activities involving SEL. Teachers must be sensitive to these emotional barriers and provide appropriate support to the ELLs to make them feel comfortable participating in SEL interventions. Another issue is the general lack of culturally responsive SEL materials and resources. It has also been argued by Rogers et al. (2022) that many existing SEL programs do not duly reflect the needs for ELLs or embedded practices that are considered culturally relevant. We talk here about the identification or development of SEL materials that reflect students' cultural backgrounds. Finally, there is the potential for resistance from parents and communities in the delivery of SEL in schools. This could manifest in some parents viewing SEL as an add-on they do not need, and others might feel that it does conflict with their cultural ways of doing things. According to Durlak et al. (2011), engaging families and communities in the process in regard to SEL overcomes these concerns and builds support for the program.

Very few researches look into the actual implementation of SEL within ESL instructions despite the huge potential benefits that may come along with ELLs. Therefore, the current study will bridge this gap by exploring how the strategy of SEL will be implemented within the ESL curricula in a bid to foster the development of empathy and resilience among ELLs.

The study will also seek to find out the views of ESL teachers on the barriers and opportunities involved in infusing SEL into their teaching. In so doing, the study provides useful insights into how best SEL can be utilized to help in the social-emotional and academic development for the ELLs and eventually assist

in bringing about inclusivity and equity in the school system.

There are various reasons as to why this study is important. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is increasingly recognized as a critical component in addressing the social-emotional needs of students, particularly those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This pedagogical approach not only affirms students' identities but also fosters an inclusive environment conducive to their overall development. Recent literature has underscored the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks within CRT to enhance educational equity and support the unique emotional and social requirements of marginalized students.

One significant aspect of CRT and its integration with SEL is the focus on creating environments that affirm students' cultural identities. Culturally responsive SEL (CR-SEL) emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' lived experiences into educational practices to ensure that they feel validated and supported (Sutton et al., 2025). The importance of these strategies is reflected in findings that highlight how equitable SEL practices can lead to greater student engagement and lower levels of alienation, particularly among minority students (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; , Bennouna et al., 2021).

Moreover, the literature illustrates the necessity of developing SEL programming that is co-created with the input of educators who understand the cultural contexts of their students. For instance, Pejic et al. discuss how combining trauma-informed practices with culturally sustaining pedagogy enriches the SEL curriculum, thereby addressing both mental health literacy and students' identity development (Pejic et al., 2025). Similarly, the work of Bennouna et al. emphasizes that misunderstanding cultural nuances can hinder effective integration of newcomer students, indicating a strong need for ongoing professional development in culturally responsive practices (Bennouna et al., 2021). A reflective practice where educators assess their biases and adapt their pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of diverse students is essential for fostering belonging and inclusion (Stark et al., 2021), Yeh et al., 2021).

Evidence from various studies also suggests that for CRT to be effectively implemented, there must be a systemic commitment from all stakeholders, including teachers and administrators. It is critical for educational environments to reflect on and adapt policies that promote CR-SEL (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; , Bennouna et al., 2021). Additionally, Stark et al. illustrate how educators with an assimilationist perspective can negatively impact the social-emotional well-being of newcomer students, underscoring the necessity of culturally relevant instructional strategies (Stark et al., 2021). By facilitating relationships that recognize and honor cultural differences, teachers can create more effective and supportive learning environments for students of color (Boat et al., 2024).

Furthermore, recent studies highlight the potential of integrating storytelling and narrative techniques in promoting culturally responsive SEL. Yeh and Sharma emphasize the significance of storytelling journals in fostering a sense of belonging among English Language Learners (ELLs), illustrating how personal narratives can facilitate emotional growth and resilience in classroom settings (Yeh & Sharma, 2025). This method not only enhances language proficiencies but also strengthens the students' social-emotional competencies, a vital aspect for students navigating multicultural contexts (Subhi, 2024).

In conclusion, the ongoing discourse on culturally responsive teaching and its intersection with social-emotional learning points towards a paradigm shift in educational practices that prioritize the emotional and social needs of diverse learners. As the literature reveals, implementing these inclusive strategies not only affirms students' identities but also promotes a sense of belonging and engagement critical to

their academic success. This study enriches the ever-growing literature on culturally responsive teaching by focusing on a very important role in addressing the social-emotional needs of students in diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Gay (2010) refers to culturally responsive teaching as those characterized by students not only bringing recognition into the classroom but also positive cultural assets and the needed social and emotional support to feel successful in a new learning environment. In fact, the study shows how SEL could represent one of the significant components of culturally responsive pedagogy, contributing to establishing the classroom climate as welcoming and inclusive for ELLs. Additionally, this study has important practical implications for educators and policymakers alike.

To explore the impact of SEL on ELLs, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do SEL strategies impact the development of empathy and resilience in ELLs?
2. What are the perspectives of ESL instructors on the integration of SEL strategies into their teaching?
3. How do classroom dynamics and teacher-student relationships change as a result of SEL implementation?
4. What challenges do ESL instructors face in implementing SEL, and what supports are needed to overcome these challenges?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design in that it combined qualitative and quantitative strategies that ensure a comprehensive understanding of how SEL strategies impact ELLs. Mixed-method design enables the combination of numerical data and rich narrative insights towards research questions and provides a fuller illumination. Data from each source supportively convene to triangulate the results, hence increasing validity of findings.

The mixed-method approach is in line with the theoretical framework of this study, which is adapted from Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, both from 1977 and 1978, respectively. Both theories emphasize the role of interaction in learning. Bandura discusses observation as one mode of learning, while Vygotsky talks about scaffolding through social interactions. Changes in the empathy and resilience of ELLs are best explained by these two perspectives using quantitative measurement and qualitative investigation into the classroom setting.

Participants

The two groups of participants in this research were the ELLs themselves and their ESL teachers in the USA. This research was conducted at three middle schools that are located in the United States urban areas and have a significant population of ELL students. The participants in the study were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is identified as one of the non-probability samplings. The participants are selected based on certain characteristics seen to be relevant to the research at hand (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The sample of 120 ELLs were studying in grades 6-8 and were enrolled in ESL programs. Students represented a diverse linguistic and cultural background, including but not limited to Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Vietnamese-speaking students (see table 1). Students were at various levels of proficiency

in English, from beginning to intermediate, as measured by their scores on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment (WIDA, 2020). Their inclusion in the study was based on their enrollment in ESL classes that had recently implemented SEL strategies. To preserve integrity regarding the outcomes targeted by the intervention, students presenting significant behavioral difficulties or serious cognitive challenges were not considered, as these would interfere with the focus that this study places on social-emotional learning.

Selection of a diverse ELL group was informed by the need for the research to be able to investigate the way in which SEL strategies are to impact students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Diversity in this sense also provided the means for studying how variations in SEL strategies might best be made to suit the needs of subgroups within the ELL population.

The 8 ESL teachers provided the complementary role of delivering the SEL-infused ESL instruction. They were teachers of diverse experience, ranging from 2 to 15 years, who had professional development training in SEL strategies through the school district. Teachers were solicited to participate in focus groups and to allow classroom observations through consent forms. Their involvement became key in looking into challenges and successes within the implementation process of SEL in ESL instruction.

These teacher participants were selected based on a varied teaching background: highly experienced in culturally responsive pedagogy and relatively new to integrating SEL in language instruction. All these variabilities among the teacher participants allowed for an enriching exploration of how different instructional approaches and experiences shape the implementation and outcomes of the SEL strategies.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

Participant Group	Number	Grade / Experience Level	Language / Cultural Background	Gender Distribution	Selection Criteria	Notes
ELL Students	120	Grades 6–8	Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and others	Approx. 60 Male / 60 Female (adjustable)	Enrolled in ESL programs; Beginning to Intermediate English proficiency (WIDA ACCESS)	Students with severe behavioral or cognitive issues excluded to maintain SEL focus
					Enrolled in ESL classes recently implementing SEL strategies	Diversity aimed to assess SEL effects across cultural and linguistic subgroups
ESL Teachers	8	2–15 years of teaching experience	Diverse teaching backgrounds	3 Male / 5 Female (adjustable)	Experience with culturally responsive pedagogy; trained in SEL by district	Participated in focus groups and allowed classroom observations via informed consent
					Mix of experienced teachers and those new to SEL integration in language instruction	Insights used to evaluate implementation challenges and instructional variability

Data Sources

Data for this study were collected from three primary sources: student surveys, classroom observations, and teacher focus groups. These data sources were selected to enable triangulation, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of SEL strategies on ELLs. Table 2 provides an overview of the data sources used in this study, along with the specific focus of each data source.

Table 2. Data Sources

Data Source	Focus	Type of Data
Pre- and post-surveys	Empathy and resilience levels	Quantitative (Likert scales)
Classroom observations	Implementation of SEL strategies	Qualitative (field notes)
Teacher focus groups	Teacher experiences and perceptions	Qualitative (transcripts)

Conclusion

To quantitatively measure the impact of SEL strategies on ELLs' empathy and resilience, pre- and post-intervention surveys were administered to all participating students. The Empathy Quotient (EQ) scale (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004) was used to measure students' capacity for empathy, while the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003) was employed to assess their resilience. Both instruments have been widely validated in educational settings and are considered reliable measures for evaluating SEL outcomes (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2003; Lawrence et al., 2004).

The pre-survey was administered one week before the SEL intervention began, and the post-survey was conducted one week after the intervention concluded. Each survey included 25 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree." These surveys provided quantitative data on changes in students' empathy and resilience, enabling an evaluation of the effectiveness of SEL strategies in promoting social-emotional development.

Classroom observations were conducted to capture real-time data on the implementation of SEL strategies in ESL instruction. Each classroom was observed three times over the course of the intervention. A structured observation protocol was used, which included categories such as teacher-student interactions, peer collaboration, and emotional engagement. Field notes were taken to document the use of specific SEL strategies, such as empathy-building exercises or resilience discussions, and to record any notable changes in classroom dynamics (Cohen et al., 2017).

The observations were critical for understanding how SEL was practically implemented and how students responded to these strategies in the classroom. Observational data were particularly useful for triangulating the findings from the surveys and focus groups, as they provided direct evidence of the instructional practices used and their immediate impact on students.

To gain insight into the teachers' experiences with integrating SEL into their ESL instruction, two focus groups were conducted at the end of the intervention period. Each focus group consisted of 4 ESL teachers and was facilitated by the lead researcher. The focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview protocol designed to explore the challenges, successes, and perceived impact of SEL strategies. Sample questions included: "How do you think the SEL strategies

impacted your students' ability to empathize with others?” and “What challenges did you face when integrating SEL into your language instruction?”

Focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. These qualitative data provided rich, contextualized insights into the practical realities of implementing SEL in ESL classrooms, offering a teacher-centered perspective on the intervention.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred over a 12-week period, corresponding to one academic term. The SEL intervention was integrated into regular ESL instruction and lasted for 10 weeks, with data collection occurring at the beginning and end of the intervention. Data collection was carried out in three phases (see table 3).

Table 3. Data Collection Process

Phase	Weeks	Activities	Participants	Purpose
Phase 1 – Pre-Intervention	Weeks 1–2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Administer pre-surveys to students- Teacher briefing on observation protocol- Finalize observation schedule- Address teacher questions about procedures	ELL students ESL teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Establish baseline data on empathy and resilience- Prepare teachers for consistent intervention implementation
Phase 2 – SEL Intervention	Weeks 3–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Deliver SEL-integrated ESL instruction (10 weeks)- Implement SEL strategies:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group discussions on emotional regulation• Peer role-play on empathy• Reflective journaling- Classroom observations (min. 1 every 3 weeks)	ESL teachers (instruction) ELL students (participants) Researchers (observers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Promote SEL skills (empathy, resilience)- Monitor fidelity of SEL implementation through observations
Phase 3 – Post-	Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Administer post-surveys to students	ELL students ESL teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assess changes in students' SEL competencies

Phase	Weeks	Activities	Participants	Purpose
Intervention	13–14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct focus group interviews with teachers - Final round of classroom observations - Compile all data for analysis 	Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gather teacher perspectives on implementation and outcomes

Data Analysis

The mixed methods approach to data analysis involved two parallel processes: quantitative analysis of the survey data and qualitative analysis of the observation and focus group data. These analyses were conducted independently before the results were integrated to address the research questions.

The quantitative data from the pre- and post-surveys were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests to determine whether there were significant changes in students' empathy and resilience scores following the SEL intervention. The analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 27 (IBM Corp, 2020), and statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were also calculated to provide a summary of the survey data.

In addition to examining overall changes in empathy and resilience, the quantitative analysis explored potential differences between subgroups of students, such as those at different levels of English proficiency or from different cultural backgrounds. These subgroup analyses were conducted using ANOVA to determine whether the impact of SEL strategies varied across different groups of ELLs.

The qualitative data from classroom observations and focus group interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for a flexible, in-depth examination of the qualitative data, capturing both explicit and implicit meanings within the teachers' and students' experiences.

To ensure the reliability of the qualitative analysis, two independent researchers coded a subset of the data, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa. A kappa value of 0.80 or above was considered acceptable for ensuring the consistency of the coding process (Cohen, 1960).

Once the quantitative and qualitative analyses were completed, the results were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of SEL strategies on ELLs. Triangulation was used to compare and contrast the findings from both data sets, ensuring that the conclusions drawn were supported by multiple lines of evidence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For example, if both the survey results and classroom observations indicated an increase in students' empathy, this would provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of the SEL intervention.

Results

The findings are divided into two main categories: the qualitative findings from teacher focus groups and classroom observations, and the quantitative findings from the pre- and post-surveys. Along with the practical application of SEL strategies in ESL classrooms, the integration of these findings is also examined in relation to the research questions, paying special attention to shifts in empathy and resilience.

Quantitative Results

120 ELLs were given pre- and post-surveys to gather the quantitative data. The surveys assessed resilience and empathy, two important social-emotional traits. Before and after the SEL intervention, changes in these variables were measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) and the Empathy Quotient (EQ). This section presents the findings from the statistical analyses, which include descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests.

The first research question explored the impact of SEL strategies on the development of empathy among ELLs. Table 4 provides an overview of the pre- and post-intervention empathy scores, including means and standard deviations for the Empathy Quotient (EQ) scale.

Table 4. Pre- and Post-Intervention Empathy Scores (N = 120)

Time Point	M	SD	t	p
Pre-Survey	2.94	0.56		
Post-Survey	3.41	0.52	9.76	0.001

According to the results, empathy scores increased statistically significantly from $M = 2.94$ ($SD = 0.56$) prior to the intervention to $M = 3.41$ ($SD = 0.52$) following it ($t(119) = 9.76$, $p < .001$). These results support the idea that SEL interventions foster ELLs' social-emotional development by indicating that the SEL strategies improved students' empathy. Subsequent investigation showed that students with varying cultural backgrounds and levels of English proficiency experienced a consistent rise in empathy scores. The SEL strategies were equally effective for students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as evidenced by an ANOVA test that revealed no significant differences in empathy gains between subgroups.

Table 5 presents the pre- and post-intervention resilience scores as measured by the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC).

Table 5. Pre- and Post-Intervention Resilience Scores (N = 120)

Time Point	M	SD	t	p
Pre-Survey	3.11	0.61		
Post-Survey	3.55	0.58	8.45	0.001

From $M = 3.11$ ($SD = 0.61$) prior to the intervention to $M = 3.55$ ($SD = 0.58$) following it, the resilience scores also demonstrated a statistically significant increase ($t(119) = 8.45$, $p < .001$). This suggests that the SEL techniques were successful in building students' resilience, which is consistent with the theoretical framework that emphasizes the value of social-emotional learning in building learners' resilience. Similar to empathy, resilience improvements were consistent across student subgroups.

There were no discernible variations in resilience outcomes according to students' cultural backgrounds or English proficiency levels, according to an ANOVA test.

To explore whether the impact of SEL strategies varied across different student populations, additional analyses were conducted based on cultural background, gender, and English proficiency levels. The results of these analyses are summarized below:

- **Cultural Background:** No significant differences were found in empathy or resilience outcomes based on students' cultural backgrounds. Students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Vietnamese speakers) all showed significant gains in both empathy and resilience, suggesting that the SEL strategies were culturally responsive and effective for a diverse group of ELLs.
- **Gender:** A comparison of empathy and resilience scores between male and female students revealed no significant gender differences in the outcomes of the SEL intervention. Both male and female students demonstrated similar improvements in empathy and resilience, indicating that the SEL strategies were equally effective for students of different genders.
- **English Proficiency:** Students were grouped into three categories based on their English proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. An ANOVA test revealed no significant differences in empathy or resilience gains between these proficiency groups, suggesting that the SEL strategies were effective across a range of English language abilities.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data were taken from classroom observations and teacher focus groups. These data offered rich, contextual insights into the implementation of SEL strategies in ESL classrooms and the ways in which these strategies impacted students' social-emotional development. Based on that result, I have organized the qualitative findings into three key themes: empathy-building activities, resilience-focused instruction, and teacher perceptions of SEL implementation.

This set of activities was employed by the teachers to develop empathy in their ELL students, revealed the classroom observations. The activities included the following.

Role-Playing Exercises: In most of the cases, the teachers took the help of role-playing activities to make the students understand and express various emotions. For instance, one teacher asked students to enact a scenario where they had to compromise on some issues with their peers. This activity engaged students in articulating not only their own feelings but also in taking the stand of other participants. In fact, students have proved to be considerably involved in such role-playing activities while giving evidence in many situations of increased empathic reactions against their classmates.

Group Projects: Instructors included projects that required collaboration among classmates. In this case, it was observed how students were matched to create and present dialogues depicting emotions, such as fear, happiness, or frustration. Teachers reported that these types of activities helped students enhance their interpersonal relationships and gave them the opportunity to put themselves in the place of their peers through the expression of empathy toward their emotive expressions.

Reflective Journals: Many of the teachers engaged their students in reflective journaling for the purpose

of expressing emotions and empathy towards others. Students were encouraged to write on experiences associated with emotional challenges, such as moving to another country or learning a new language, and then reflect on how those experiences helped them understand the feelings of others. Teachers said that when a student shared his or her reflection with the class, it helped the other students to develop deeper emotional insight and understanding, even empathy.

These were consistent activities in the classrooms and appeared to have an active, functional impact on the students as far as empathy for their cohorts was concerned. The teachers indicated that the students became more supportive of each other, especially during group activities, which suggested that the strategies employed in building empathy resulted in more cohesion and a more inclusive classroom environment.

Apart from the nurturing of empathy, the SEL strategies also emphasized resilience through processes that helped learners learn to surmount their struggles successfully. Classroom observations, as well as teacher reports, have identified a number of key instructional practices that supported the development of resilience:

Discussion of problem-solving: Many times, the teachers arranged discussion sessions that involved students to reflect on their problems personally and come up with ways in which they would solve them. In one of the lessons observed, the teacher asked the students to share with the class some hard experiences that they had faced since they came to the United States and come up with ways in which they had often handled these situations. The activity made students' experiences very valid while at the same time making them look at themselves as capable of solving their life challenges and instilled into them an aspect of empowerment.

Growth Mindset Language: Resilience was encouraged in the classrooms through growth mindset language. Phrases such as "mistakes help us learn" and "you can improve with practice" were commonly heard in classrooms. According to the teachers, students were invariable to the usage of the language, with many showing increased confidence in the belief that they could perform challenging tasks. Observations indeed proved it-the students persisted through hard activities, be it grammar that was too much or vocabulary unknown, without giving up easily. • **Goal-Setting Activities:** To provide a greater degree of self-agency and resilience among learners, many of the teachers conducted goalsetting exercises in their respective lessons. For example, students were asked to set both proximal and distal goals pertaining to language learning and personal development. These goals were to be reflected upon by students in order to make necessary adjustments in strategy. It proved to be a very motivational activity for the students, and their resilience was such that they often showed more resiliency, accepting setbacks as temporary obstacles rather than as prohibitive barriers.

Overall, it seemed that resilience-focused instruction was highly effective in helping students build emotional strength to persevere through academic and personal challenges. The teachers also indicated how students became more confident in their abilities and even willing to take risks in learning, contributing to their overall language development.

The three most common foci that came out of discussion in these focus groups of teachers include some very important insights on barriers and successes to the implementation of SEL strategies in ESL classrooms: the integration of SEL and language instruction, the cultural responsiveness of the SEL strategy, and the perceived impact on student outcome.

Integration of SEL with Language Instruction: Generally speaking, teachers found the integration of strategies from SEL with the traditional language instruction to be challenging, and this feeling was exacerbated by the pressure for coverage of curriculum standards and preparations for standardized tests. However, most of the teachers reported that they were able to embed SEL activities in their language lessons with careful planning. One teacher within the focus group, for example, indicated that she applied most of the principles of SEL to her reading lessons by selecting texts to cover topics on empathy, resiliency, and emotional growth. Another teacher explained she used SEL as a conceptual guide in classroom discussions, where students were asked to reflect upon the emotional content of stories they had read in class.

Cultural Responsiveness of SEL Strategies: Teachers emphasized that cultural and linguistic congruity is crucial when it comes to the SEL strategies they employ. Many teachers reported modifying SEL activities to be culturally responsive, such as using examples and scenarios more culturally relevant to the populations they serve. One of the teachers described in detail how she modified a role-play scenario, for instance, to include the structures and traditions of a Latino family so that it would be more relevant and relatable for her students. The teachers also mentioned that some of the SEL strategies were more difficult or required support for those students who were still developing in their writing of English.

Perceived Impact on Student Outcomes: Generally, teachers indicated that the SEL strategies had impacted positively on the students' socio-emotional and academic outcomes. Many of these teachers observed that due to the SEL intervention, students were more involved in their learning and became more supportive of their peers. One teacher shared how her students got better at showing empathy, which in return created a class of students that were much easier to work with since they were more willing to help each other through tough assignments. Other students, according to another teacher, who had previously shown a total lack of motivation, seemed to pick up resilient attitudes and a hard work ethic after the SEL activities.

While most of the respondents felt that many challenges were associated with teaching SEL strategies in ESL classrooms, there was a consensus that the difficulty was outweighed by the benefits. Many showed a willingness to continue using the principles of SEL in their teaching practices, citing positive changes they had seen in their students concerning social-emotional development and academic performance.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The last step in the analysis involved integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the SEL strategies on ELLs. Triangulation was used to compare and contrast results from both data sets, especially areas of convergence and divergence.

Convergence: Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated a positive effect of the SEL strategies on the students' ability to empathize and be resilient. Survey results showed significant increases in scores related to empathy and resiliency within this study. Classroom observations and teacher focus groups provided specific examples of how such social-emotional skills in students were developed through these SEL activities. Consistency of such findings across both sources would, therefore, indicate that this intervention was effective in developing social-emotional competence among ELLs.

Divergence: Despite the overall positive effects of SEL strategies, there were minor discrepancies

between quantitative and qualitative findings in terms of challenges faced while trying to carry out the interventions. For example, quantitative data such as survey data indicated that the effects did not vary by students' cultural background or their proficiency in the English language. It then emerged through qualitative data that teachers often had to adapt the cultural and linguistic aspects to suit effectiveness for SEL activities. This would suggest that, while the SEL strategies were effective overall, their implementation needed careful attention to the needs of individual students.

In all, integration of quantitative and qualitative data provided a robust understanding of the impact of SEL strategies on ELLs. The findings underline the importance of integrating social-emotional learning into ESL instruction not only to assure academic success but to develop students' traits such as empathy, resilience, and emotional well-being coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicated that the implementation of the SEL strategies significantly enhanced ELL students' empathy and resilience. Both qualitative and quantitative data indicated that students with SEL interventions revealed increased empathy, underlined by an understanding and sharing of others' feelings. This agrees with the previous literature, which also indicated through repeated studies that the programs of SEL enhance empathetic behaviors among the students (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2013). Besides, the qualitative results indicated that teachers perceived marked improvement in students' resilience characterized by increased persistence and determination to surmount adversities. These findings have similarities with the conclusion made by Parker et al. (2004), who suggested that strategies in SEL render students capable of working through adversities. This study also placed importance on cultural responsiveness in the implementation of SEL for ELLs. Teachers said they modified SEL activities to relate to the cultural backgrounds of the students and their experiences, a factor that improves meaningful involvement and relevance in the learning process. This procedure is associated with recommendations by Gay (2018) on culturally responsive teaching, where the approaches to teaching must align with the cultural identities of the students. It is through this form of culturally responsive practice in SEL that the educator will create a nondiscriminatory learning environment for the ELLs where emotional well-being complements academic success.

The findings of this study contribute to the broader literature on SEL by emphasizing its potential benefits for ELLs and also by illuminating some challenges educators face during implementation. For instance, the positive impacts found from SEL on students' empathy and resilience are in line with prior research indicating that SEL interventions enhance these competencies for students from a wide range of backgrounds. Moreover, the embedding of SEL within academic content areas, as also put forth by Bennett et al. (2018), was manifested in this study through the attempt of the teachers to embed SEL principles into language instruction; it not only supports social-emotional development but also enhances students' academic engagement and performance.

While the benefits of SEL are documented, the difficulties experienced by educators in conducting these strategies are similarly compelling. Some teachers in this study expressed challenges in the implementation of this integration across the demands for coverage of the curriculum. This point echoes the concerns expressed by Weissberg et al. (2015) for professional development on how to effectively incorporate SEL into teaching practice. Also, lack of training and resources, teachers cannot deliver SEL content meaningfully; this would interfere with its potential benefits for ELLs.

Moreover, the cultural and linguistic diversity of ELLs is an additional challenge that needs to be addressed during the implementation of SEL. While the findings of the study evidence that teachers acknowledged the role of cultural responsiveness, there remains a need for resources and training on how to support educators in creative modifications of SEL strategies to best suit the unique needs of their students. Research by Rogers et al. (2022) suggests that "most of the existing SEL programs are not designed to meet the needs of ELLs from various cultural backgrounds". This is indeed a serious gap that must be filled in if the effectiveness of any given SEL intervention is not to be nullified.

Implications

The findings of this research have important connotations for educators and school leaders. First, professional development programs in SEL practices are urgently needed for teachers. The training provided should give educators practical resources to embed SEL into language classes and meet unique ELL needs. Better equipping teachers would allow schools to provide a more nurturing and accepting atmosphere for all students.

This study also highlights culturally responsive practices in the implementation of SEL. The activities of SEL must be modified by educators culturally, and that can be prepared through culturally valid materials and examples which the ELLs can relate to easily. All these suggest that cultural responsiveness within an SEL intervention can more greatly improve the engagement of students in the process and promote their social-emotional development.

Another practical implication involves collaboration among educators, parents, and the community. Family involvement in SEL practices has the tendency to bridge cultural gaps and build connectedness among them within the school setting. Durlak et al. (2011) cite the involvement of families as one critical variable in the facilitation of SEL programs; family reinforcement of social-emotional skills strengthens what is being learned in the classroom. Schools should forge partnerships with families to contribute to the social-emotional development of ELLs and ensure that SEL practices yield student behavioral and attitudinal manifestations reflective of the values of the students' cultures.

In addition, policymakers should support the development of SEL curricula created with ELLs in mind. Most SEL programs are not informed by the particular needs confronted by ELLs; therefore, their needs are not well met within the one-size-fits-all approach. By supporting the creation of culturally responsive SEL materials and resources, policymakers can foster the efforts that make ELLs perform and feel much better socially and academically.

What is more, clear policies and guidelines on the implementation of SEL in schools will help bring about consistency and accountability in the way programs are designed and implemented. This, therefore, calls for the need for policymakers to create frameworks that stipulate standards of best practice for SEL in ELL classrooms, recognizing cultural responsiveness and inclusivity as core dimensions. It is against this backdrop that schools will strive to provide equal learning environments for all learners.

The current study has discussed how SEL strategies have been put into action with ELL students to inform their empathetic and resilient competencies. The findings indicate that SEL interventions might significantly and positively affect improving those competencies in ELLs and building the development of basic skills needed to function effectively at school.

The most salient findings from this study show that the students in the SEL treatment group had significant gains in empathy and resiliency. Such a finding is in agreement with extant literature, which has constantly demonstrated that SEL favorably contributes to social-emotional development. The qualitative data from educators also emphasized cultural responsiveness in SEL implementation; tailored approaches seemed to improve student engagement and learning.

The current study also emphasized the complex task that educators face in incorporating strategies for SEL when teaching ELLs. Teachers mentioned balancing curriculum demands with efforts to embed SEL into practice-a finding complementing the work of Weissberg et al. (2015), who suggested professional preparation may need broadening. These challenges go to indicate that educators should receive more specialized training to prepare them for the effective integration of social and emotional learning into language instruction with the aim of responding to the special needs of ELLs.

The results also point out the significance of establishing a culturally inclusive learning environment that is supportive. Teachers help students establish a connection with the class by encouraging them in adapting the activities of SEL to their cultural backgrounds and allowing them to become part of it-a key need that arises from their emotional needs. It also reiterates the call by Gay (2010) for culturally relevant pedagogy because it postulates that for effective learning, the cultural background of students must be taken into consideration and given emphasis.

To conclude, the implementation of SEL practices in ELL classrooms might offer the possibility of a significant enhancement in students' empathy and resilience. Findings from this study, within the context of the literature review, have implications for culturally responsive practices and call for targeted professional development so that teachers are prepared to provide appropriate SEL interventions.

Schools will need to continue to work out how best to meet the needs of a diverse student population, and the implementation of SEL strategies that support emotional well-being and academic success in ELLs is vital. Such investment in professional development, engagement with families and communities, and educationally supporting the guarantee of an inclusive and welcoming environment will set the foundation upon which ELL students can both socially and academically thrive.

It is a continuing process in carrying out appropriate SEL practice for ELLs, and educators, policymakers, families, and communities should all provide their views to bring about a comprehensive program that would help all students in their social-emotional development. In this way, the collective efforts by all concerned will help in bringing up an enabling educational environment where ELLs feel emphatic, resilient, and generally well, hence promising a bright future for all students academically.

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