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## Cultivating Empathy and Resilience: Implementing Social-Emotional Learning Strategies to Empower English Language Learners

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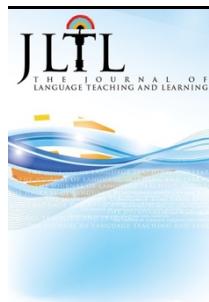
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# Cultivating Empathy and Resilience: Implementing Social-Emotional Learning Strategies to Empower English Language Learners

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how social-emotional learning (SEL) techniques help English language learners (ELLs) develop empathy and resilience. In this study, which uses a Convergent Mixed Methods design, teacher focus groups and classroom observations were used to acquire qualitative data while pre- and post-surveys were used to collect quantitative data. Eight English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the USA and 120 ELLs make up the participants. Both Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which function as the study's compass and highlight the importance of social connections for kids' emotional and cognitive development. The results showed a statistically significant rise in students' empathy and resilience following the intervention, while qualitative analysis showed enhanced emotional engagement in the classroom and better teacher-student connections. In fact, integrating SEL into ESL instruction changed classroom dynamics and built a conducive learning environment. These findings in turn offer the belief that SEL strategies are critical to the holistic development of ELLs, improving academic and emotional well-being alike. In this connection, some recommendations include educator incorporation of SEL practices into the curriculum, and targeted teacher training.

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In recent years, the education sector has seen growing interest in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a critical component in developing students' social, emotional, and academic capacities. The process of developing the ability to identify and control one's emotions, set constructive objectives, empathize with others, build wholesome relationships, and make ethical choices is known as emotional learning. It is "the process through which children and adults acquire and apply the understanding, mindset, and abilities necessary to comprehend and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, build and sustain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions," as stated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013). Although widely practiced across different levels of education, the incorporation of SEL within English Language Learning (ELL) instructions remains relatively unexplored. Special challenges that the ELLs face include language barriers, cultural adaptation, and emotional distress, all of which pertain to academic and social survival (Rivas, 2024). Teaching, therefore, should not be designed focusing on cognitive learning only but also needs to include aspects of social and emotional development (Schonert-Reichl, 2005).

In affluent nations as well as the United States alone, where 10.4% of K–12 pupils are categorized as ELLs, the number of ELLs in schools is still rising (Uysal, 2024). Many have varied languages and cultural histories, which makes learning more difficult for them. When coupled with the stress and strain of learning a new language, these challenges often lead to elevated levels of tension, anxiety, and even feelings of loneliness (Adeyeye, 2024). ELLs are therefore especially susceptible to social-emotional issues like anxiety, poor self-worth, and difficulties establishing peer connections. SEL seems to be a promising way to address these issues. Research has documented that SEL interventions can affect the academic performance, social-emotional learning, and emotional health of students. Even with these clear advantages of SEL, its use in ELL instruction is still largely studied. The integration of SEL into ESL courses may offer vital support for the academic advancement and

emotional health of students classified as ELLs, given their unique demands (Elias et al., 2015).

### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), two complementary conceptual frameworks that essentially explain the role of social interaction and pertinent external factors in cognitive and emotional development, served as the foundation for this study. As a result, they are highly helpful when researching SEL in ELL contexts.

According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, people pick up specific behaviors, attitudes, and emotions by watching the actions, attitudes, and emotions of others. According to Bandura (1977), learning is a social process in which people pick up knowledge and abilities by interacting with their surroundings, particularly by watching teachers, peers, and other role models. This process is called observational learning or vicarious learning. In other words, Bandura's theory contends that students can develop certain extremely important socio-emotional abilities, like empathy and resilience, in the classroom by observing teachers and classmates and making positive social connections. In actuality, ELLs are likely to pick up social-emotional skills from environments where peers and teachers model and reinforce them, internalize them, and use them in their social interactions.

Bandura's study is expanded upon in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which highlights the significance of social interaction and cultural background in the process of cognitive development as a whole. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that learning is a socially mediated process that occurs in the zone of proximal development, where students, under the guidance of more experienced individuals—such as peers or teachers—achieve a higher level of understanding than they could have on their own. In SEL, this would mean that students might develop socio-emotional skills through scaffolded interactions with classmates and teachers who provide an example of acceptable social behavior and offer constructive criticism. Since

ELLs still rely mostly on social cues and cultural norms to navigate unfamiliar surroundings and form connections, these encounters become extremely important (Thorne & Lantolf, 2006). By incorporating SEL into ESL instruction, teachers can provide ELLs with chances to participate in meaningful social interactions that will support their emotional growth and cultural adjustment.

### *1.2. Rationale for the Current Study*

This study is motivated by the growing understanding of the value of SEL in fostering student achievement as well as the unique difficulties encountered by ELLs. Few research have been done on the particular effects of social-emotional learning on English Language Learners (ELLs), primarily in the development of empathy and resilience, despite the fact that numerous prior studies have demonstrated the advantages of this approach in general education settings. Examining how SEL may be incorporated into ESL instruction as a strategy to help ELLs holistically is becoming a priority due to the growing diversity of students and ELLs.

Empathy and resilience are two particularly crucial social-emotional skills (Chadwick, 2014). One approach to comprehend and experience other people's emotions is through empathy. In the classroom itself, an empathic approach fosters healthy interactions and a sense of community (Solomon et al., 1996). This is how it operates, according to Zaki (2014). In fact, ELLs who may experience emotions of loneliness or cultural alienation are better equipped to relate to their classmates and deal with social difficulties when they cultivate empathy (Romano, 2021). Similarly, resilience—the capacity to bounce back and effectively adjust to difficulties—becomes crucial for ELLs in the face of setbacks associated with a new language and cultural setting. In this way, SEL techniques that facilitate the development of these skills can help ELLs overcome social and academic obstacles and thrive in their new educational environments.

However, despite the enormous potential benefits that ELLs may offer, very few studies

examine the actual application of SEL within ESL training. In an effort to promote the growth of empathy and resilience among ELLs, the current study will close this gap by investigating how the SEL method will be included into ESL curriculum.

The research will also try to learn what ESL teachers think about the opportunities and challenges of incorporating SEL into their lessons. By doing this, the study offers helpful insights into how SEL might be used to support ELLs' academic and social-emotional growth and ultimately aid in promoting fairness and diversity in the educational system.

### *1.3. Significance of the Study*

This study's importance stems from a number of important contributions it seeks to make to the body of current literature. The exploration of SEL's role in fostering social-emotional development among ELLs—a demographic that has received little support from educational research and practice—represents a key gap in the literature that it fills. By concentrating on two essential skills—empathy and resilience—that are particularly pertinent to ELLs, this study offers fresh perspectives on how SEL might be tailored to the unique requirements of this population.

By emphasizing a crucial role in meeting the social-emotional needs of students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, this study contributes to the expanding body of research on culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2013) describes culturally responsive teaching as students who not only bring recognition to the classroom but also favorable cultural assets and the social and emotional support required to feel at ease in a completely new learning environment. The study actually demonstrates how SEL could be an essential part of culturally responsive teaching, creating an inviting and inclusive classroom for English language learners.

## **2. Literature Review**

In recent years, there has been an ever-growing interest in using strategies of SEL within

educational contexts for supporting ELLs (Meland & Brion-Meisels, 2024). The following literature review synthesizes key research findings in three major areas: the theoretical underpinning of SEL, the effects of SEL on empathy and resiliency, and the needs and challenges faced by ELLs within this context.

## 2.1. Theoretical Underpinnings in Social-Emotional Learning

SEL is based on several psychological and educational theories that identify the prominence of social-emotional competencies in ensuring student success. Goleman's (1995) model of emotional intelligence provides one foundational framework for describing and defining SEL. Being aware of oneself, autonomy, motivation, empathy, and social skills are the five components of emotional intelligence, according to Goleman (1995). It is a collection of skills that are crucial to a student's life because they have an impact on his interpersonal relationships in addition to his academic performance.

Another important theoretical framework that undergirds SEL is the Social Learning Theory, first described by Bandura in 1977. According to this theory, learning is a rather observational, imitational, and modeling process in acquiring new behaviors, including social-emotional competencies. In a contribution by Bandura, he emphasized that the social environment shapes the individual behaviors; hence, he suggests that students learn the ways of social-emotional competencies by observing their teachers and peers practice prosocial interactions.

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) gives SEL a voice from an ecological perspective by highlighting the various levels of influence in a child's development. According to this theory, a child's social and emotional development processes are either facilitated or hindered by the interplay of family, school, community, and culture. Because ELLs frequently navigate challenging cultural and language environments, this ecological viewpoint is very relevant to them.

The five basic competencies identified by CASEL (2013) are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision making. This framework is likely the most extensively used for SEL. This provides a more organized method for teaching SEL in classrooms, which aids teachers in helping kids acquire these skills.

## 2.2. Social-Emotional Learning and Its Association with Empathy and Resilience

Consistently, research has demonstrated that SEL interventions enhance the empathy and resilience of students. In the meta-analyses conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), over 200 studies related to SEL programs were reviewed; students in over 200 studies who received SEL interventions demonstrated striking improvements in social-emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance. The review underlined the transformative potential of SEL to enhance two of the most important competencies for student success: empathy and resilience.

The ability to understand and feel another person's feelings is known as empathy, and it is a fundamental component of meaningful interpersonal connections and constructive social interactions. Empathic people are far more inclined to assist and share with their peers, according to Eisenberg and Miller (1987). In fact, SEL programs have been shown to improve students' empathy by offering structured exercises that allow students to express their feelings and consider the viewpoints of others. For example, Jones et al. (2013) found that students who received SEL training had greater empathy scores than students who did not.

Resilience herein refers to a person's potentiality of resisting and rising above adversity. Research evidence indicate that SEL programs enhance resilience because such programs help students build coping strategies and regulating skills (e.g. Labelle, 2023; Min et al, 2024). A study conducted by Parker et al. (2004) showed that students trained in SEL had higher resilience and also performed better academically, compared to students uninvolved in any such training programs. Indeed,

Wang et al. (2019) confirmed that SEL strengthens resilience by fostering supportive connections within student and adult networks—a support system that students may rely on when needed.

Research also emphasizes how crucial it is to incorporate SEL into the curriculum in order to fully achieve its potential to improve resilience and empathy. According to Bennett et al. (2018), for instance, integrating SEL into academic subject areas will result in a more cohesive learning environment where students can practice resilience and empathy within environmentally appropriate validity. Students' academic engagement and achievement are improved together with their social-emotional skills because to this embedment.

### *2.3. Social-Emotional Learning and English Language Learners*

An objective assessment of SEL practices that can be specifically tailored to the requirements of ELLs is necessary because to their unique problems. Many ELLs struggle with social isolation, cultural differences, and language barriers—all of which could impede their social-emotional growth. The development of positive peer connections and supportive classroom environments is one of the groups that benefits most from SEL, according to research (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

One major consideration in the implementation of SEL strategies for ELLs is cultural responsiveness. Research by Gay (2018) has highlighted the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, which not only acknowledges and appreciates the cultural backgrounds of students but also does so in a way that ensures such acknowledgment fosters academic success. Culturally responsive SEL programs would help the ELLs to face the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment while developing their social-emotional competencies.

Indeed, studies have shown that culturally appropriate SEL treatments can significantly improve ELLs' social-emotional skills. For example, Vasquez et al. (2016) found that ELL children who received a culturally sensitive SEL curriculum showed more empathy and resilience than their

peers who received solely traditional language training. These results provide credence to the notion that SEL activities are more likely to engage with students and result in genuine social-emotional learning when they are integrated in a way that is consistent with their lives and experiences.

Additionally, SEL strategies can assist ELLs develop a sense of belonging in the classroom by helping them make relationships with teachers and peers. According to Orosco and O'Connor (2014), SEL techniques guarantee that students interact with one another in a positive way, which enables ELLs to have a sense of intimacy with their peers. Zins et al. (2004) state that social-emotional abilities are included in language acquisition since students must interact socially with others in order to have opportunities to utilize their language. By encouraging social-emotional learning, educators provide a safe environment where ELLs are more willing to take linguistic chances, which improves language learning.

### *2.4. Challenges in Implementing Social-Emotional Learning for English Language Learners*

Though promising, existing literature highlights that there are some challenges that can be encountered in the attempt to put SEL for ELLs into practice. The first is the lack of professional preparation on how educators can incorporate strategies into the teaching of languages. According to Weissberg et al. (2015), there is a need for well-structured training programs that prepare teachers for the implementation of the SEL program. Teachers who are not adequately trained may fail to provide SEL content and make adjustments to meet their ELL students' needs.

Furthermore, the cultural and linguistic variety of ELLs presents additional challenges in the application of the SEL case. According to Vaughn et al. (2015), ELLs have a variety of cultural origins, each with its own values and views about how to express themselves in social and emotional circumstances. For example, as the literature suggests, educators must be cognizant of these concerns and ensure that SEL techniques are

nondiscriminatory and considerate of students' varied cultural perspectives. For kids to be protected and supported in a secure setting that is conducive to learning, teachers and students must work closely together and communicate effectively.

ELLs may also experience additional emotional problems while learning the language. According to Lee (2014), ELLs frequently experience anxiety and dissatisfaction when learning a new language, which might make it difficult for them to participate in SEL-related activities. To help ELLs feel comfortable taking part in SEL interventions, teachers must be aware of these emotional obstacles and offer the proper support. The general dearth of culturally sensitive SEL resources and materials is another problem. Additionally, Rogers et al. (2022) have stated that many of the SEL programs now in use do not appropriately reflect the requirements of ELLs or embedded practices that are deemed culturally relevant.

Lastly, the implementation of SEL in schools may encounter opposition from communities and parents. According to Durlak et al. (2011), some parents may perceive SEL as an unnecessary add-on, while others may feel that it goes against their cultural norms. Durlak et al. (2011) claim that involving families and communities in the SEL process resolves these issues and increases program support.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

In order to provide a thorough knowledge of how SEL tactics affect ELLs, this study used a convergent mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Combining rich narrative insights with numerical data to address research problems is made possible by mixed-method design, which offers a more comprehensive understanding. In order to triangulate the results and increase the validity of the conclusions, data from each source supportively come together.

The study's theoretical framework, which is based on Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory

and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, is consistent with the mixed-method approach. The importance of interaction in learning is emphasized by both theories. Vygotsky talks about scaffolding through social interactions, while Bandura considers observation as one method of learning. These two viewpoints, which use quantitative assessment and qualitative research into the classroom environment, best explain changes in ELLs' empathy and resilience (Lamprea Altuve, 2020).

The following research questions serve as a guide for our investigation on how SEL affects ELLs:

- Do SEL techniques affect ELLs' growth in empathy and resilience?
- What do ESL teachers think about incorporating SEL techniques into their lessons?
- Does the use of SEL alter the dynamics of the classroom and the relationships between teachers and students?
- What obstacles must ESL teachers overcome in order to introduce SEL?

#### 3.2. Participants

The ELLs themselves and their ESL teachers in the USA were the two categories of participants in this study. This study was carried out at three middle schools with ELL students that are situated in urban areas of the United States. Purposive sampling was used to choose the study's participants. One type of non-probability sampling is called purposeful sampling. Participants are chosen according to specific attributes thought to be pertinent to the current study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

#### Student Participants

The 120 ELLs in the sample were enrolled in ESL programs and were in grades 6–8. Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Vietnamese- speaker students were among the many linguistic and cultural backgrounds that the students represented. According to their results on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment, students' English ability ranged from beginning to intermediate. (WIDA, 2020).

WIDA ACCESS for ELLs is a standardized, large-scale English language proficiency assessment designed to measure the academic English skills of students identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) in grades K–12. Administered annually in U.S. schools and other WIDA Consortium member institutions, the test evaluates WIDA English Language Development Standards are in line with students' competency in four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Decisions about reclassification, placement, and instructional planning are influenced by the findings. Their participation in ESL classrooms that had recently adopted SEL techniques was the basis for their involvement in the study. Students with severe behavioral issues or cognitive disabilities were not taken into consideration in order to maintain the integrity of the intervention's intended outcomes, since they would conflict with the study's emphasis on social-emotional learning.

The necessity for the study to be able to examine how SEL practices are to effect pupils of varied cultural and linguistic origins guided the selection of a diverse ELL sample. This kind of diversity also made it possible to investigate how different SEL approaches might be tailored to the requirements of ELL population subgroups.

The significant enrollment of ELL children from a variety of backgrounds in languages and cultures (such as Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Vietnamese) led to the selection of the three urban schools. The investigation of SEL outcomes across various subgroups was made possible by this deliberate decision. Our objective of investigating fairness and inclusivity throughout SEL implementation was facilitated by ensuring variety across cultural and linguistic identities.

Table 1  
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)

### *Participating Teachers*

Delivering SEL-infused ESL instruction was the complementing job of the eight ESL teachers. They were educators with a range of experience, from two to fifteen years, who had received SEL strategy professional development training from the school system. Through consent forms, teachers were asked to allow classroom observations and to take part in focus groups. Their participation became crucial in examining the difficulties and achievements encountered during the SEL implementation process in ESL education. The selection of these instructors to participate was based on their diverse teaching backgrounds: they were relatively new to incorporating SEL into language instruction and had extensive expertise with culturally responsive pedagogy. A fascinating investigation of how various instructional techniques and experiences influence the use and results of the SEL tactics was made possible by all these differences among the teacher participants.

### *3.3. Data Sources*

Three main sources of data were gathered for this study: instructor focus groups, classroom observations, and student surveys. In order to facilitate triangulation and guarantee a more thorough comprehension of the effects of SEL methods on ELLs, several data sources were chosen. A summary of the data sources used in this study is given in Table 1, along with each data source's particular focus.

### *Pre- and Post-Surveys*

All participating students were given surveys before and after the intervention to quantify the effect of SEL methods on the empathy and resilience of ELLs. Students' empathy was measured using the Empathy Quotient (EQ) scale (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), and their resilience was evaluated using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Both tools are regarded as trustworthy metrics for assessing SEL outcomes and have received extensive validation in educational contexts (Davidson-Hunt & Berkes, 2003; Lawrence et al., 2004).

One week prior to the start of the SEL intervention, the pre-survey was given, and a week following the end of the intervention, the post-survey was carried out. A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess each survey's 25 items, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree." The success of SEL tactics in fostering social-emotional development could be assessed thanks to the quantifiable data these surveys offered on improvements in students' empathy and resilience.

### *Classroom Observations*

Real-time data on the application of SEL methods in ESL instruction was gathered through classroom observations. Throughout the intervention, three observations were made of each classroom. Peer collaboration, teacher-student interactions, and emotional engagement were all incorporated in the structured observation methodology. Field notes were taken to record any significant shifts in classroom dynamics as well as the application of certain SEL techniques, such as empathy-building activities or resilience talks (Cohen et al., 2017).

Assessing whether SEL was actually used in the classroom and how kids reacted to these tactics depended heavily on the observations. Because observational data offered firsthand proof of the instructional strategies employed and their direct effects on students, they were especially helpful in

triangulating the results from the questionnaires and focus groups.

The research team created the structured observation technique for this study based on the conceptual frameworks of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, both of which highlight the importance of social interaction in both emotional and intellectual growth. The three categories—teacher-student relationships, collaboration among peers, and emotional engagement—were chosen to reflect observable behaviors that demonstrate empathy and resilience in educational settings and to correspond with fundamental elements of social-emotional learning.

To ensure content validity, the protocol was established using a literature-informed method and reviewed by two experts in the domains of TESOL and educational psychology. Based on their input, changes were made to enhance readability, conformity to SEL criteria, and suitability for classrooms with a variety of language backgrounds. During a pilot observation phase, inter-rater reliability was also assessed. The tool's dependability for use in classroom observations was confirmed by acceptable agreement levels (Cohen's  $\kappa > .80$ ).

### *Teacher Focus Groups*

At the conclusion of the intervention session, two focus groups were held to learn more about the instructors' experiences incorporating SEL into their ESL instruction. The primary researcher led each focus group, which included four ESL teachers. The focus groups, which lasted roughly ninety minutes, used a semi-structured interviewing technique to examine the difficulties, achievements, and perceived effects of SEL tactics. "How do you think the SEL strategies impacted your students' ability to empathize with others?" was one example of a question. and "When incorporating SEL into your language instruction, what difficulties did you encounter?"

The semi-structured interview questions were created after a thorough analysis of the literature on culturally responsive teaching, English language

learners (ELLs), and social-emotional learning (SEL). The questions were developed based on important topics found in the literature, including classroom connections, emotional engagement, and cultural adaptation.

Two specialists in language education and social-emotional development examined the interview process to make sure the material was clear and pertinent. Based on their comments, a few minor changes were made. In order to evaluate the questions' suitability and clarity, two ESL teachers who were not participating in the main study piloted the questions. The pilot assisted in improving the questions' phrasing and organization to increase their capacity to elicit insightful, pertinent answers.

For analysis, the focus group audio recordings were verbatim transcribed. These qualitative data offer rich, grounded perspectives on the real-world difficulties of integrating SEL in ESL lessons as well as a teacher-centered perspective on the intervention.

#### *Cultural Validity of Instruments*

Although the Empathy Quotient (EQ) and CD-RISC are established instruments, they were originally designed for general populations and not specifically validated for ELLs. To increase cultural appropriateness, instructions were simplified, and teachers provided language support during administration. However, we recognize that cultural interpretations of empathy and resilience may vary, and this remains a limitation of our measurement approach.

#### *3.4. Data Collection Procedure*

Over the course of 12 weeks, or one academic term, data was collected. Data was collected at the start and finish of the 10-week SEL intervention, which was included into regular ESL training. There were three stages to the data collection process:

##### *Phase 1: Pre-Intervention (Weeks 1-2)*

During the first two weeks, baseline data were collected through the administration of pre-surveys to all student participants. Additionally, teachers

were briefed on the observation protocol, and classroom observation schedules were finalized. Additionally, teachers had the chance to ask questions regarding the data gathering methods and the SEL intervention.

##### *Phase 2: SEL Intervention (Weeks 3-12)*

The SEL intervention was conducted during regular ESL classes. Teachers incorporated specific SEL strategies designed to promote empathy and resilience, including group discussions on emotional regulation, peer-to-peer role-playing exercises, and reflective journaling activities. Classroom observations took place throughout this phase, with each classroom being observed at least once every three weeks.

The SEL intervention featured a series of organized techniques specifically designed to help ELL students develop empathy and resilience. It was incorporated into standard ESL training. Teachers implemented activities aligned with CASEL's five core competencies - particularly focusing on self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. Key strategies included:

- **Group Discussions on Emotional Regulation:** Students engaged in guided conversations about identifying and managing emotions, using culturally relevant scenarios. These discussions promoted emotional vocabulary development and encouraged perspective-taking.

- **Peer-to-Peer Role-Playing Exercises:** Students participated in simulated social situations (e.g., resolving conflicts, expressing gratitude, helping a peer) to practice empathy and prosocial behavior. These activities allowed students to internalize SEL concepts through active modeling and observation, in line with Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

- **Reflective Journaling:** Students maintained weekly journals where they wrote about their emotional experiences, challenges, and strategies for resilience. Teachers used prompts such as, "Describe a time you felt misunderstood" or "How did you overcome a difficult moment?" to facilitate emotional reflection and self-regulation.

These strategies were selected for their accessibility to ELLs and were adapted to align with students' language proficiency levels. The instructional design was informed by both the

CASEL framework and relevant research on SEL for linguistically diverse learners.

#### Phase 3: Post-Intervention (Weeks 13–14)

In the final two weeks, post-surveys were administered to students to measure any changes in empathy and resilience. Additionally, focus group interviews with teachers were conducted to gather feedback on the SEL implementation process and its perceived impact. Classroom observations concluded at the end of this phase, and all data were compiled for analysis.

The SEL curriculum included weekly modules aligned to CASEL's core competencies, covering empathy, emotional regulation, and perseverance. Each week featured three structured components: a discussion-based lesson, a collaborative activity (e.g., role-play), and a reflective journaling prompt. Materials were adapted for ESL settings, ensuring accessibility for ELL students.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

The Giresun University Institutional Review Board gave its approval to this study. Families of the student participants as well as all participating teachers provided written informed consent. In compliance with ethical research criteria pertaining to minors, informed consent was also obtained from the minor participants.

#### *Standardization of Intervention*

To ensure consistency across classrooms, the SEL intervention followed a standardized 10-week curriculum developed by the research team. This curriculum included weekly themes, structured lesson plans, and activity guides for empathy and resilience building. Teachers received two pre-intervention training sessions and weekly implementation checklists. Ongoing virtual meetings and observation feedback ensured fidelity across all classrooms.

#### *3.5. Data Analysis*

Two concurrent procedures were used in the mixed methods approach to data analysis: the

quantitative analysis of survey data and the qualitative analysis of focus group and observation data. Before the findings were combined to answer the research questions, these analyses were carried out separately.

To find out if students' empathy as well as resilience scores changed significantly after the SEL intervention, paired-samples t-tests were used to assess the quantitative data collected through the pre- and post-surveys. SPSS Version 27 (IBM Corp, 2020) was used for the analyses, and  $p < .05$  was chosen as the threshold for statistical significance. To give an overview of the survey data, descriptive statistics like averages and standard deviations were also computed.

The quantitative research investigated possible variations among student subgroups, such as those with varying degrees of English proficiency or cultural origins, in addition to looking at general shifts in empathy and resilience. To ascertain whether the effects of SEL techniques differed among various ELL groups, these subgroup assessments were carried out using ANOVA.

Thematic analysis, a technique for finding, examining, and summarizing patterns (themes) within data, was used to evaluate the qualitative data from focus group interviews and classroom observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because it enables a flexible, in-depth study of the qualitative data and captures both obvious and unstated meanings within the experiences of the teachers and students, thematic analysis was used.

Two separate researchers coded a portion of the data to guarantee the validity of the qualitative analysis, and Cohen's kappa was used to determine inter-rater reliability. To guarantee the reliability of the coding procedure, a kappa value of 0.80 or higher was deemed appropriate (Cohen, 1960).

#### *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data*

Following the completion of the quantitative and qualitative studies, the findings were combined to offer a thorough knowledge of how SEL techniques affect ELLs. In order to ensure that the conclusions reached were backed by several lines of evidence, triangulation was employed to compare and

contrast the results from both data sets (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For instance, it would be compelling proof of the SEL intervention's efficacy if both the survey data and classroom observations showed an improvement in students' empathy.

#### 4. Results

The quantitative findings from the pre- and post-scales and the qualitative findings from teacher focus groups and classroom observations make up the two main areas of the results. The incorporation of these results is also examined in light of the study topics, paying special attention to shifts in resilience and empathy as well as the useful application of SEL techniques in ESL classrooms. 120 ELLs completed pre- and post-surveys to get the quantitative data.

The surveys measured two key social-emotional outcomes: empathy and resilience. Changes in these characteristics were measured both prior to and following the SEL intervention using the Empathy Quotient (EQ) and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). This section presents the findings of the statistical procedures, including descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests. The Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests were used to verify that the assumptions for homogeneity and normality satisfied the necessary criteria.

The impact of SEL techniques on ELLs' empathy development was examined in the first study question. An overview of the empathy scores before and after the intervention is given in Table 2, together with the average and standard deviation for the Empathy Quotient (EQ) scale.

Table 2  
Pre- and Post-Intervention Empathy Scores (N = 120)

Time Point	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Pre-Survey	2.94	0.56			
Post-Survey	3.41	0.52	9.76	0.001	0.89

Empathy scores increased statistically significantly from  $M = 2.94$  ( $SD = 0.56$ ) prior to the treatment to  $M = 3.41$  ( $SD = 0.52$ ) following the intervention ( $t(119) = 9.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The premise that SEL treatments assist social-emotional development among ELLs is supported by these data, which indicate that the SEL techniques had a favorable effect on students' capacity for empathy. Subsequent investigation showed that the rise in empathy scores held true for pupils from various cultural origins and English proficiency levels. An ANOVA test showed no significant differences in

empathy gains between subgroups, indicating that the SEL strategies were equally effective for students with diverse linguistic and cultural experiences. A paired-samples t-test indicated a significant increase in empathy,  $t(119) = 9.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.89$ , suggesting a large effect size.

The effect of SEL techniques on pupils' resilience was the subject of the second study question. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) resilience scores before and after the intervention are shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
Pre- and Post-Intervention Resilience Scores (N = 120)

Time Point	M	SD	T	p	Cohen's d
Pre-Survey	3.11	0.61			
Post-Survey	3.55	0.58	8.45	0.001	0.77

Furthermore, after the intervention, the resilience ratings rose statistically substantially from  $M = 3.11$  ( $SD = 0.61$ ) to  $M = 3.55$  ( $SD = 0.58$ ) ( $t(119) = 8.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). According to the theoretical framework that highlights the importance of emotional and social education in fostering learners' resilience, this implies that the SEL practices enhanced students' resilience. Like empathy, resilience improved for a number of student subgroups. An ANOVA test revealed no appreciable differences in resilience outcomes based on students' ethnic origins or proficiency in English levels.

Further analyses of cultural background, gender, and level of English proficiency were carried out to investigate whether the effects of SEL techniques differed across various student demographics. Below is a summary of these analyses' findings:

**Cultural Background:** Students' cultural backgrounds did not significantly affect their empathy or resilience outcomes. Significant improvements in empathy and resilience were demonstrated by students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (such as Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Vietnamese speakers), indicating that the SEL techniques were successful and culturally sensitive for a wide range of ELLs.

**Gender:** There were no discernible gender disparities in the SEL intervention's results when male and female students' empathy and resilience scores were compared. The SEL practices were equally successful for kids of both genders, as seen by the similar increases in empathy and resilience shown by both male and female students.

**English Proficiency:** Based on their levels of English proficiency, students were divided into three groups: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The SEL techniques were successful throughout an array of English language proficiency levels, according to an ANOVA test that found no statistically significant variations in empathy or resilience increases between these competence groups.

Teacher focus groups and classroom observations provided the qualitative data. These data provided extensive, contextual insights on how

SEL techniques were used in ESL classrooms and how they affected the social-emotional growth of the children. Based on that outcome, I have categorized the qualitative results into three main themes: teacher impressions of SEL implementation, resilience-focused instruction, and empathy-building activities.

#### *Empathy-Building Activities*

The classroom observations showed that the teachers used this series of exercises to help their ELL students develop empathy. The following were among the activities.

**Role-playing Activities:** The majority of the time, teachers used role-playing exercises to help pupils comprehend and communicate a range of emotions. One teacher, for example, had the pupils act out a situation in which they had to make concessions to their peers on certain points. Through this exercise, students were able to express not only their own emotions but also those of other participants. Students have actually demonstrated a significant level of engagement in these role-playing exercises, as seen by numerous instances of heightened empathy for their peers.

**Group Projects:** Teachers assigned assignments that called for cooperation between students. In this instance, it was noted how students were paired up to write and deliver dialogues that represented various emotions, such as delight, fear, or irritation. Instructors noted that these kinds of exercises improved students' interpersonal skills and provided them with the chance to empathize with their peers' emotional displays.

**Reflective Journals:** To help their students articulate their feelings and empathy for others, many teachers encouraged them to keep reflective journals. Students were invited to write about experiences related to emotional difficulties, such as relocating abroad or picking up another language, and then consider how those experiences aided in their understanding of other people's emotions. Instructors claimed that once a student presented their reflections to the class, the other students were able to gain more profound emotional insight, comprehension, and even empathy.

The pupils' empathy for their peers seemed to be positively impacted by these regular classroom activities. The teachers reported that the kids grew more supportive of one another, particularly during collaborative tasks, which implied that the techniques used to foster empathy produced a more cohesive and welcoming learning environment.

#### *Resilience-Focused Instruction*

In addition to fostering empathy, the SEL techniques placed a strong emphasis on resilience by teaching students how to effectively overcome obstacles. Several important teaching strategies that promoted the growth of resilience have been found in classroom observations and teacher reports:

**Talk about fixing problems:** Teachers frequently set up discussion sessions where students were asked to consider their own issues and devise solutions. During one of the courses that were observed, the instructor encouraged the students to discuss some difficult situations they had encountered since arriving in the United States and to come up with solutions. The exercise gave pupils a sense of empowerment and validated their experiences while also encouraging them to see oneself as capable of overcoming obstacles in life.

**Growth Mindset Language:** Growth mindset language was used in the classroom to promote resilience. Words like "you can get better with practice" and "errors help us grow" were frequently used in classrooms. Teachers reported that pupils were consistent in their use of the language, and they were demonstrating a greater sense of confidence in their ability to complete difficult assignments. It was evident from observations that the students persevered through challenging assignments, whether they involved difficult grammar or unfamiliar terminology, without giving up readily.

**Goal-Setting Activities:** Many of the teachers included goal-setting activities in their lessons to help students develop a higher level of self-agency and resilience. For instance, students were required to establish both distal and remote objectives related to language acquisition and personal growth. Students were expected to consider these objectives

in order to modify their approach as needed. The kids found it to be a highly motivating exercise, and their ability to rebound was such that they frequently shown greater resilience, viewing failures as transient challenges rather than insurmountable hurdles.

In general, research appeared that resilience-oriented training was quite successful in giving children the emotional fortitude to overcome both personal and academic obstacles. Additionally, the teachers described how students' increased self-assurance and willingness to take chances in their education contributed to their entire language growth.

The combination of SEL and language learning, the cultural adaptability of the SEL approach, and the expected effect on student outcome are the three most prevalent topics that emerged from these teacher focus groups, offering some crucial insights on obstacles and achievements to the execution of SEL techniques in ESL classrooms.

**Implementation of SEL with Language Education:** In general, teachers found it difficult to incorporate SEL strategies into traditional language instruction. This feeling was made worse by the pressure to cover curriculum standards and prepare for standardized tests. Nonetheless, the majority of educators stated that, with careful preparation, they were capable to incorporate SEL activities into their language classes. For instance, one focus group instructor said that she used the majority of SEL's tenets in her reading sessions by choosing works that addressed themes of emotional development, empathy, and resilience. Another instructor described how she employed SEL as a theoretical basis for class discussions in which students were challenged to consider the psychological aspects of stories they had read.

**Cultural Adaptability of SEL methods:** Teachers stressed the importance of language and cultural congruence in the SEL tactics they use. Many educators reported adapting SEL exercises to be more culturally sensitive, such as by adopting scenarios and examples that are more appropriate for the communities they work with. In order to make a role-play situation more real and meaningful for her students, one of the instructors

went into great detail about how she included the customs and structures of a Latino family. Additionally, the teachers noted that some of the SEL tactics were more challenging or needed assistance for students whose English writing skills were still developing.

**Reported Effect on Student Performance:** Teachers generally reported that the kids' academic and socioemotional results had improved as a result of the SEL practices. Many of these educators saw that children were more engaged in their education and developed greater peer support as a result of the SEL intervention. One instructor described how her pupils became more adept at demonstrating empathy, which led to a group of students who were lot easier to deal with because they were more eager to support one another through challenging assignments. Another teacher said that after the SEL exercises, some kids who had previously demonstrated a complete lack of motivation appeared to develop robust dispositions and a robust work ethic.

Although the majority of respondents believed that teaching SEL methods in ESL classes presented numerous difficulties, there was general agreement that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Many expressed a desire to keep incorporating SEL principles into their teaching methods, citing improvements in their students' academic achievement and social-emotional growth.

In order to provide a thorough understanding of how the SEL techniques affected ELLs, the final stage of the investigation required merging the quantitative and qualitative results. Results from both data sets were compared and contrasted using triangulation, particularly in instances of convergence and divergence.

**Convergence:** The quantitative and qualitative data showed that the SEL techniques improved the kids' capacity for empathy and resilience. Empathy and resilience levels increased significantly in this study, according to survey results. Examples of how these SEL activities helped students develop these social-emotional skills were given by teacher focus groups and classroom observations. Therefore, consistent results from both sources would suggest

that the program was successful in helping ELLs build social-emotional competence.

**Divergence:** There were slight differences across quantitative and qualitative data about the difficulties encountered when attempting to implement the treatments, despite the general beneficial impacts of SEL techniques. For instance, quantitative data from surveys showed that the impacts were independent of students' English language skill or cultural background. Qualitative research later revealed that teachers frequently had to modify linguistic and cultural elements to make SEL programs more effective. This would imply that although the SEL techniques were generally successful, their application required close consideration of each student's needs.

Overall, a thorough knowledge of how SEL techniques affect ELLs was made possible by the combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The results highlight how crucial it is to incorporate social-emotional learning into ESL education not just to ensure academic achievement but also to help students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds acquire qualities like empathy, resilience, and emotional well-being.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that the application of SEL techniques greatly improved the empathy and resilience of ELL pupils. Students who received SEL treatments demonstrated more empathy, as seen by their comprehension and sharing of others' emotions, according to both qualitative and quantitative data. This is consistent with earlier research showing that SEL programs improve students' empathetic behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, the qualitative findings showed that teachers thought students' resilience had significantly improved, as seen by their increased perseverance and will to overcome challenges. These results are consistent with the conclusion drawn by Parker et al. (2004), who proposed that SEL techniques enable pupils to overcome obstacles. Additionally, this study emphasized the significance of cultural sensitivity in the use of SEL for ELLs. In order to promote

meaningful engagement and connection in the educational process, teachers said they adapted SEL exercises to link to the varied cultural backgrounds and experiences of the students. This process is linked to Gay's (2018) suggestions on culturally appropriate instruction, which state that instructional strategies should be in line with students' cultural identities. The teacher will establish a welcoming educational setting for the ELLs where academic achievement is complemented by emotional well-being through this type of culturally sensitive SEL practice.

The results of this study add to the body of knowledge on SEL by highlighting its possible advantages for ELLs and shedding light on some of the difficulties teachers have when putting it into practice. For example, the beneficial effects of SEL on students' resilience and empathy are consistent with earlier studies showing that SEL interventions improve these skills for kids from a variety of backgrounds. Additionally, the attempt by the teachers to incorporate SEL values into language teaching demonstrated the incorporation of SEL within educational areas, as also proposed by Bennett et al. (2018); this approach not only promotes social and emotional growth but also improves students' academic participation and performance.

Although the advantages of SEL are well-established, the challenges teachers face when implementing these techniques are equally compelling. The actualization of this synthesis across the needs for curriculum coverage presented difficulties for several of the study's teachers. The issues raised by Weissberg et al. (2015) regarding professional development regarding the successful integration of SEL into teaching practice are echoed in this point. Additionally, teachers are unable to effectively teach SEL topics due to a lack of resources and training, which would impede the potential advantages for ELLs.

Furthermore, another issue that must be resolved while implementing SEL is the cultural and language variety of ELLs. Although the study's results show that instructors recognized the importance of cultural responsiveness, there is still a need for tools and training to help teachers adapt

SEL techniques creatively to best meet the particular requirements of their pupils. According to a study by Rogers et al. (2022), "the majority of the current SEL programs are not intended to address the requirements of ELLs from different cultural backgrounds." If the efficacy of any particular SEL intervention is to be maintained, this is a significant gap that has to be filled.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory can be used to explain the observed increase in empathy. Throughout controlled SEL exercises like role-play and discussion, children learned to adopt sympathetic behaviors by watching teachers and peers. Students' internalization and replication of modeled prosocial behavior in peer interactions can be explained by Bandura's theory of vicarious reinforcement.

In a similar vein, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory affirms the need of scaffolded interactions in SEL sessions. Students received support from their classmates and instructors within their zone of proximal development while they worked together on goal-setting or problem-solving tasks, which promoted the development of resilience and emotional competence.

The results of this study have significant implications for school administrators and teachers. First, teachers desperately need continuing education programs in SEL techniques. Teachers should receive useful tools from the training to integrate SEL into language sessions and address the particular needs of ELL students. Schools could provide a more loving and welcoming environment for all students if teachers were better prepared.

Additionally, this study emphasizes culturally sensitive SEL implementation techniques. Teachers must adapt SEL exercises to the cultural context of their students. This can be done by preparing culturally appropriate materials and examples that ELLs can easily relate to. These imply that cultural sensitivity in a SEL intervention can significantly increase students' participation in the process and foster social-emotional growth.

Collaboration between teachers, parents, and other people is another practical effect. In the educational context, family participation in SEL practices tends to close cultural divides and foster a

sense of community. One important factor in the facilitation of SEL programs, according to Durlak et al. (2011), is the engagement of families; familial affirmation of social-emotional skills reinforces what is learnt in the classroom. In order to support ELLs' social-emotional growth and make sure that SEL activities result in student attitudinal and behavioral expressions that reflect the principles of the students' cultures, schools should collaborate with families.

Policymakers should also encourage the creation of SEL courses designed with ELLs in consideration. ELLs' requirements are not adequately addressed by the one-size-fits-all approach because the majority of SEL programs are not tailored to their unique needs. Policymakers can encourage the development of culturally sensitive SEL resources and materials, which will improve the social and academic performance and well-being of ELLs.

Furthermore, the design and execution of SEL programs in schools will be more consistent and

accountable if there are defined policies and procedures in place. Therefore, it is imperative that policymakers develop frameworks that specify best practices for SEL in ELL schools, acknowledging inclusion and cultural responsiveness as essential components. Schools will work to create appropriate educational settings for all students in light of this.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, the precision of self-reported results may be impacted because the measures were not culturally tested especially for ELLs. Second, the sample's generalizability was restricted to three metropolitan American schools. Third, even though the SEL curriculum was uniform, there may have been differences in how teachers implemented it. Lastly, long-term follow-up to evaluate long-term impacts was absent from the study. Future studies should investigate culturally grounded assessment instruments and employ longitudinal methods.

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