



REVISTA KRONOS

Exploring Social and Emotional Learning for Better Teaching Practice

María del Carmen Rondal Guanotasig | iD Universidad Central del Ecuador (Ecuador)

Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina | iD Universidad Central del Ecuador (Ecuador)

Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa | iD Universidad Central del Ecuador (Ecuador)

ABSTRACT Social and emotional learning (SEL) and its benefits have currently not been sufficiently socialized among teachers, families, and communities. The educational system has mainly focused on some approaches that support cognitive development, while studies worldwide indicate that the SEL framework promotes students' academic, social, and emotional growth. Therefore, the bibliographical research aims to highlight the importance of SEL and the upsides to integrating it into language learning as part of an interdisciplinary axis through its application in daily life. The approach is qualitative with quantitative support for data analysis, and descriptive research that employed an online survey to collect data from forty-seven English professors of Instituto Académico de Idiomas (IAI) at Universidad Central del Ecuador. The results were analyzed through SPSS software. The findings revealed that most instructors were knowledgeable about SEL; however, they wanted to deepen their knowledge about it and how to apply it in their classes. Additionally, it emerged that instructors used indeed few collaborative tasks, but these were not identified as SEL activities. Besides, they were neither sure whether the Institute promotes social projects involving students' participation, nor if SEL is part of the curriculum. Certainly, there is a need to develop different socio-emotional skills in students. Consequently, it is crucial to train teachers on SEL, which may positively impact the acquisition of language skills. Finally, further research and projects are needed to identify whether SEL activities support language learning in Ecuadorian education or not.

KEYWORDS SEL, competencias, teachers, students, CASEL

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Descubriendo el aprendizaje socio emocional para una mejor práctica docente

RESUMEN Actualmente, el aprendizaje socioemocional (SEL) y sus beneficios no han sido suficientemente socializados entre los docentes, familias y comunidades. El sistema educativo principalmente se ha centrado en algunos enfoques que ayudan al desarrollo cognitivo únicamente, mientras que estudios alrededor del mundo indican que el modelo formativo SEL promueve el crecimiento académico, social y emocional de los estudiantes. Por esta razón, este estudio bibliográfico pretende resaltar la importancia del SEL y las ventajas de integrarlo en el aprendizaje del idioma como parte de un eje interdisciplinario a través de su aplicación en la vida cotidiana. El enfoque es cualitativo con un aporte cuantitativo de investigación descriptiva que empleó una encuesta en línea como instrumento para recolectar datos de cuarenta y siete profesores de inglés del Instituto Académico de Idiomas (IAI) de la Universidad Central del Ecuador. Los resultados se analizaron mediante el software SPSS. Estos revelaron que la mayoría de los docentes tenían conocimientos sobre SEL; sin embargo, querían profundizar sus conocimientos sobre el mismo y la manera de aplicarlo en sus clases. Además, se observó que, de hecho, los profesores utilizaban pocas tareas colaborativas, pero no las identificaban como actividades SEL. Además, no estaban seguros de si el instituto promueve proyectos sociales que impliquen la participación de los alumnos, ni tampoco si SEL forma parte del plan de estudios. Es evidente que existe la necesidad de desarrollar diferentes habilidades socioemocionales en los estudiantes. En consecuencia, es crucial capacitar a los profesores en SEL, esto puede repercutir positivamente en la adquisición de habilidades del idioma. Finalmente, se necesitan más investigaciones y proyectos para identificar si las actividades SEL promueven o no el aprendizaje de idiomas en la educación ecuatoriana.

PALABRAS CLAVE SEL, competencias, docentes, estudiante, CASEL

INTRODUCTION

Although Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a non-academic framework, several studies in the US and countries globally have been conducted to reveal the benefits of SEL in a person's life. "UNESCO, Rethinking Learning, refers to the positive results that SEL has generated in students when the five essential skills mentioned in casel.org are applied" (Rethinking Learning: A Review of Social and Emotional Learning for Education Systems, n.d.)

These skills are self-awareness, self-management, decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. They give learners the confidence and ability to overcome social and emotional issues while emphasizing the four main settings: the classroom, school, families and caregivers, and communities. By enacting it, learners can get better academic results, learn about themselves, manage their emotions, communicate with others effectively, and work together on goals.

SEL framework could be incorporated into language teaching to improve and enhance language skills development. Learners' emotional factors such as motivation, attitude, and anxiety, significantly influence the learning of a second language (L2), and SEL could help address these factors positively.

Melani *et al.* (2020) state that SEL nurtures critical soft skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and social responsibility, which are invaluable in personal and professional contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate SEL into language acquisition to allow students to use it effectively in diverse, real-world situations throughout their lives. In addition, SEL fosters a lifelong learning mindset and it is imperative in a globalized world where cross-cultural communication is increasing rapidly.

The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador includes the "Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir" policy in the curriculum. It promotes children's well-being and satisfies learner's needs (López *et al.*, 2022). SEL should be implemented in schools but it does not have proper consideration, and according to the survey conducted at IAI-UCE it is barely included in university syllabuses or English classes.

In the Ecuadorian context, SEL might offer strong and innovative contributions to language learning by promoting holistic development, enhancing interpersonal skills, reducing anxiety, and fostering inclusivity, especially to the students from IAI-UCE who come from several cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds with unique perspectives and challenges. By promoting this inclusive classroom environment, SEL will empower diverse students who might feel marginalized to get better academic performance across the board.

Thus, this study aimed to disseminate what SEL is and its benefits to promote its practice and urge teachers to focus on student's social and emotional traits and not only on language teaching content.

FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND ITS COMPETENCIES

CNN (2022) reported the results of a study in eleven countries which evidence how mental health declined dramatically after the pandemic and how the unprecedented global crisis

caused by anxiety, depression, and the consequences of post-pandemic trauma has increased drastically. Therefore, it is vital to implement SEL programs now than ever.

Meanwhile, in Ecuador, the curriculum contemplates students as bio-psychosocial and cultural beings who deserve an integral model where they will receive attention in social, psychomotor, cognitive, physical, and affective aspects within an environment that displays warmth, affection, and positive interactions. (López et al., 2022). However, it seems this objective has not been reached effectively because many teachers report disruptive behavior in schools, decreased academic performance, and even dropping out.

To (Derlin. J 2020) Teaching practice in Ecuador guides the development of the teaching profession, generating effective knowledge based on scientific, cultural, and pedagogical knowledge. This process focuses on the rational reconstruction, both individual and collective, of new ideas and theories, collectively giving new meaning to a reality that does not meet the expectations of social and personal development.

Together, learning a new language can be overwhelming, especially for disadvantaged students. SEL provides strategies for managing anxiety, building self-confidence, and fostering a positive attitude towards learning. This emotional support is pivotal in the teaching practice context in Ecuador, where many students might face additional pressures and challenges inside and outside the classroom Velazco et al. (2020).

SEL is the new version of CASEL (Collaborative Social and Emotional Learning) which is defined as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, n. d.)

Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are the competencies to helping students, teachers, families, and communities.

SELF-AWARENESS

According to CASEL (CASEL, 2023), self-awareness is the ability to understand personal emotions, feelings, values, and how to behave properly in different contexts, including recognizing strengths and limitations with confidence and determination. Daniel Goleman as cited in Day et al. (2004) referred to self-awareness as the first component of emotional intelligence besides the extent to which people are conscious of different aspects of their own identity and the perceptions about themselves and their congruence with the way other people perceive them.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Once someone identifies or is aware of their emotions and thoughts, they can learn how to manage them, motivate themselves, and work toward their personal or academic goals (CASEL'S SEL Framework, 2020).

Schlinger, M. (2020) expresses that self-management is not just understanding who you are; it also identifies what to do with that information and how to behave to achieve goals by controlling emotions and working hard toward objectives. A person can recognize the feeling, for example, anger, but what to do with that “anger” is self-management. It is a complex process in which a person needs to turn self-awareness and feelings into positive

actions. It is to manage emotions, thoughts, and behavior in a productive way for yourself and your team (Melnick *et al.*, 2017).

Self-management leads to better emotional intelligence and leadership qualities. As a skill, it cannot be inherited naturally. Still, it can be acquired by practicing healthy and disciplined subskills, for example, time management, self-motivation, stress, behavior and emotion management, adaptability, decision-making, goal alignment, and personal development.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

It entails the capacity to make responsible choices by thoroughly assessing the consequences of one's actions, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of a given situation, and incorporating advice or recommendations from others. This process involves evaluating several factors, including ethical considerations, potential outcomes, and the broader impact on oneself and others. Developing responsible decision-making skills is crucial for effectively navigating complex situations, solving problems, and making decisions that align with personal values and objectives. Espino *et al.* (2023). However, CASEL includes capacities that students need to develop:

Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness.

Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts.

Identifying solutions for personal and social problems.

Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school.

Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts. (CASEL'S SEL Framework, 2020).

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

Social awareness and relationship skills are crucial for fostering effective interpersonal interactions and collaborative efforts. According to the CASEL's framework, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), involves understanding and empathizing with others from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. Similarly, Transforming Education (2017) highlights this skill as essential for maintaining appropriate classroom behavior and creating an environment conducive to learning. These perspectives emphasize the importance of respecting others, which fosters empathy and transforms classrooms into supportive, inclusive spaces that enhance meaningful learning experiences with lasting personal and professional benefits.

Skills linked to social awareness, such as cross-cultural sensitivity, effective communication, and respect for individual differences, as identified by Yoder *et al.* (2020), are essential for building long-term, significant relationships. Greater Good in Education at the University of California, Berkeley, defines relationship skills as the ability to establish constructive relationships through listening, communication, and mutual support. These competencies significantly impact learners' interactions, promoting positive experiences and informed decision-making. When educators incorporate these skills into their teaching practices, students are better prepared for success in various life domains, including inclusive community development and social change facilitation, thereby demonstrating the extensive impact of social awareness and relationship skills in education and beyond.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SETTINGS

The “CASEL wheel” is based on five principal competencies that are interrelated and support each other in the SEL process. The competencies described before can be supported in four main settings: classrooms, schools, families, caregivers, and the community. Together, these settings can create a positive learning environment that supports students’ social, emotional, and academic development.

CASEL’S SEL Framework (2020) states that SEL can be implemented in classrooms using different approaches such as explicit instruction, cooperative learning, and project-based learning. It is imperative to highlight that social and emotional learning (SEL) impacts more than just English language learning; it plays a crucial role in holistic personal development. SEL skills contribute significantly to academic, psychological, social, and emotional growth, enabling individuals to behave appropriately in various contexts.

This can be achieved by employing activities; for instance, journal writing, guided meditation, set social scenarios, group challenges, bibliotherapy, read-aloud, positive traits recognition, practice mindfulness, daily greetings, gratitude lists, coping strategies, and so forth. These exercises need to be sequenced, active, focused, and explicit to demonstrate high-quality SEL instructions because they tackle building positive, caring relationships among students, teachers, and parents in a meaningful learning environment.

Moreover, Melnick et al. (2017) explain that teachers and parents are responsible for creating a learning environment to help learners regulate their emotions. It can be done in a friendly, organized atmosphere where they feel motivated, engaged, emotionally, and physically safe.

At the same time, the school community, which encompasses classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, playgrounds, buses, etc. needs to continually observe the evolution of SEL to integrate it throughout the institution, as this creates a sense of belonging, and a school environment in which students and adults feel valued, supported, and involved.

Talking about curriculum, Wang et al. (2012) explained the favorable results obtained by college students regarding their social and emotional competence. The curriculum integrated SEL into existing seminar courses for first-year students. The blended components included time management, note-taking in class, understanding emotions and others’ feelings, active learning, physical, emotional, and behavioral self-management, critical thinking, relationship skills, tolerance for differences, and agreement. It demonstrates that SEL is not only for children but can be implemented in college students and integrated into academic subjects or projects.

METHODOLOGY FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Concepts of qualitative and quantitative research (Bhandari, 2023) were employed in this study. On the one hand, it collected and analyzed data through an online survey with 15 questions developed in Google Forms and validated by an expert. These questions were divided into three open-ended questions and 12 closed-ended queries. The sample population was 47 English professors at the Instituto Académico de Idiomas at Universidad Central del Ecuador.

All these questions were focused on CASEL’S SEL Framework (2020) and its components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. On the other hand, the information collected from articles, journals, and online sources enabled us to understand the importance of SEL in classroom settings to contrast with the expertise, and insights of the participants. The data in this study was

statistically analyzed by using charts that offered percentages to uncover trends and correlations, whereas open-ended questions provided a variety of ideas that were considered by the recurrence of respondents' words. To then conclude to validate the importance of SEL in classroom settings

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research were driven by 47 professors' responses that gave important data about socio-emotional learning and its relation to daily teaching practices. Therefore, this section provides insights to contrast and relate previous studies with the current situation at IAI. The outputs of the research are discussed as well as their interpretations.

First of all, questions 1, 2, 13, and 14 which are related to socio-emotional learning, SEL training, and activities applied in the classroom. Question 1, respondents were asked about what socio-emotional learning is. The results obtained from the preliminary analysis are presented and show that a large group of professors, which represents 54.2% of the total, know what socio-emotional learning (SEL) is, and 38.3% are not sure about it. In question 2, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had received training about social-emotional learning (SEL) or not, 76.6 % of those who were interviewed indicated that they had not received any training, and 23.4% had not received it.

In response to question 13, do you know how to support your students to manage emotional and social areas? Just over half of those who answered this question reported that 57.4% are not sure about how to support students in the social and emotional aspects, and only 27.7% of teachers know how to do it.

When participants were asked if they would like to receive training on how to manage their emotions and incorporate them into their teaching practice, the majority (93.6 %), commented that they do like to receive training, and a minority of participants (6.4%) indicated that they would not like it.

Therefore, these results suggest there is a lack of understanding about what SEL is and which SEL competencies can be developed.

The findings highlight the significance of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) training for educators, serving as a foundational step to encourage teachers to adopt methodologies that enhance academic performance through SEL competencies. By incorporating SEL, educational institutions can foster a collaborative teaching-learning environment involving teachers, students, and their families, thereby promoting a holistic approach to learning across various educational settings.

Integrating SEL into teaching practices aims to develop students' abilities to harmonize thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to accomplish meaningful social tasks. This includes identifying, communicating, and managing emotions, building positive relationships, setting worthwhile goals, and supporting both personal and others' needs (Ferreira, 2020). Teacher training in SEL is crucial for implementing these activities effectively, as teachers with high social-emotional competency, who understand SEL processes, can better manage classroom dynamics and provide emotional and educational support, leading to improved teaching outcomes and stronger interpersonal relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

This following section of the questionnaire required respondents to give information on the use of activities that help students develop emotional competencies in an appropriate learning environment. 63.8% of those who were interviewed applied for these activities, but less than a third of those who responded (31.9%) indicated that they did not have a clear idea about them. Finally, in question 5, respondents were asked about the use of

interaction patterns in class, and what is interesting in this data is that 97.9% of teachers apply these patterns.

Regarding question 4, about the activities to develop socio-emotional learning 34% of those who were interviewed did not answer, 23.4% apply constructive feedback, and 19.1% use cultural identity activities.

The results indicate that teachers utilize interaction patterns in their teaching but have only a superficial understanding of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). While constructive feedback, a key SEL strategy, is commonly used, other SEL activities are not frequently applied, suggesting limited knowledge about the full range of SEL activities needed to develop these competencies. Only a few teachers reported using activities like guided meditation and reflection, which can enhance classroom dynamics and student participation, thus improving the learning environment.

Despite acknowledging the use of SEL activities, teachers often could not specify which ones were applied, relying instead on general activities such as positive feedback. This indicates a need for more comprehensive SEL training. Teachers recognized the benefits of group activities and collaborative work for socio-emotional development, including the development of human interaction skills and emotional balance. Integrating SEL into the traditional education system is crucial for holistic student development, requiring skills in effective communication, collaborative teamwork, and managing social challenges, as emphasized by Mahoney et al. (2018).

The next analysis summarizes questions 7, 10 and 12 which involves social and relationship skills to benefit the whole community. From the results obtained, teachers did not assign enough activities where students might apply what they learned to bond familial relationships because less than 50% did not create these kinds of activities. However, 61.7% of professors do provide activities to develop their socio-emotional competencies in their classrooms.

Besides, around 80% of teachers think there are no social projects in the institute where students can participate.

Therefore, the idea of promoting more projects should be augmented where students might take part and develop their intra- and interpersonal skills. There is such a big responsibility for families, teachers, and educational institutions to provide learners with the tools to construct a fair, healthy, and inclusive society where everybody feels appreciated, motivated, supported, and safe. All of this starts with families and then schools, where teachers should come up with activities that allow students to accept and respect themselves and their peers.

For instance, nurturing is the most effective setting for teaching SEL; the same must be safe and supportive. Adults may establish an inclusive classroom climate where students are collaborators in the learning process and elevate their agency by incorporating their own experiences and cultural backgrounds and asking for their opinions. In addition, when there are strong relationships between adults and students, co-learning can be promoted, student and adult growth can be encouraged, and collaborative solutions can be generated to solve issues. It can be done through cooperative learning project-based learning, and integration of SEL into the academic curriculum, which are examples of effective teaching techniques (CASEL'S SEL Framework, 2020).

The analysis addressed whether the syllabus includes the socio-emotional area, where 59.6% of professors are unsure about it. It means that most of them have a bare idea of what role this area has in the curriculum.

SEL instruction provides an acronym that represents four elements of SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. The same, to some extent, can be considered in the syllabus with the following characteristics: a coordinated set of training methodologies to

promote the development of competencies; emphasizing active learning methods to aid learners in practicing and mastering new abilities, centered on implementing a curriculum that consciously emphasizes the growth of SEL competencies; and identifying and focusing on specific knowledge, attitudes, and abilities (CASEL'S SEL Framework, 2020). Therefore, teachers do need to know what SEL activities are to be included in the syllabus to benefit both professors and students.

Question 9 observed that the teachers' feelings are considered in the classroom feedback while the others think they are not taken into account.

Apart from the families and caregivers, teachers also play a relevant role in providing tools and being role models to the students to manage socio-emotional skills. Authorities must allow educators to take care of themselves and foster well-being, provide feedback on their classrooms highlighting their strengths, and show empathy for the things that need to be changed. Another way that Martinsone suggests (Martinsone, 2016, as cited in Ferreira et al., 2020) is that applying socio-emotional learning can prevent teachers' burnout and support the perceptions of their self-efficacy [1¹], which is an important component of their job that needs to be applied as well.

Chart 6 depicted that 87.2% of teachers created scenarios (analyse quotes, warmers) where students develop their ability to make decisions responsibly.

It seems that most teachers set these scenarios in their daily teaching practices. However, there is no previous study where students demonstrate that this skill is incorporated in their classrooms. It must be shown in both studies to know if teachers reach the objective, which is that students make decisions about their own as well as social interactions in different contexts. These scenarios could be developed through different activities suggested by Astra et al. (2023) that brush up on this skill and help teachers manage their time effectively.

Question 15 described the teacher's perspectives on what aspects students need to develop their SEL skills. The results showed that students need to improve some points, such as emotional intelligence, decision-making, and relationship skills, which were mentioned many times by the respondents.

The responses above demonstrated the urgency to know more about SEL and how to apply it to support students in their emotional skills enhancement, especially in higher education. Conley (2015) in his article emphasizes that SEL for higher education needs to be accompanied by mindfulness because SEL emerged first to cover only elementary and secondary levels. His research demonstrated that using it improved areas, such as emotional distress, self-perceptions, and socio-emotional skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Teacher training is essential for effective SEL implementation. Educators play a paramount role in fostering social-emotional growth in students. However, they need proper training to effectively incorporate SEL strategies into their teaching practices to increase job satisfaction and reduce burnout. Providing teachers with comprehensive training ensures they can create safe and supportive classroom environments, understand the diverse needs of their students, and implement SEL practices that promote empathy, communication, and conflict resolution.

1 Self-efficacy is the conviction that you can achieve a goal by yourself and that you can do anything you set your mind to by controlling your feelings, thoughts, and behavior.

SEL is not just an optional add-on in education; it's a crucial component for the holistic development of students because it equips them with skills such as recognition of their thoughts and emotions to manage them and behave correctly, building healthy relationships to respect and understand other's perspectives, and making responsible decisions. By integrating SEL into the curriculum, schools acknowledge the importance of nurturing students' emotional well-being alongside academic achievement.

In addition to adding SEL to the curriculum, the IAI needs to foster more projects in which students can participate and be a part of building a better society, as the positive effects of SEL will reverberate to families and communities because when students practice SEL tasks at home, it promotes better communication and understanding between parents and children. In addition, the improvement of the behavior and emotional intelligence of students contributes to creating safer and more harmonious communities. SEL promotes a culture of empathy, reducing bullying, violence, and conflict.

Among the benefits for students who receive SEL education is that they are better equipped to navigate life's challenges. They develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills that enhance their well-being. These skills improve academic performance and positively impact personal relationships, mental health, and future success. SEL empowers students to become resilient and compassionate individuals who can contribute positively to society.

To conclude, research on SEL is needed because many studies state the benefits of it for students, teachers, schools, and communities. Therefore, it would be significant to find out if SEL is feasible in Ecuadorian culture and its context because, for many years, educational institutions have focused more on academic development while the social and emotional areas have not been sufficiently developed. Some teaching approaches incorporate SEL very rarely into their content; consequently, teachers need to be trained on SEL to apply it in their classrooms to improve academic outcomes and build better social-emotional citizens.

CONTRIBUTOR ROLES

- * Conceptualization: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.
- * Formal analysis: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.
- * Research: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Alvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.
- * Methodology: Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.
- * Data management: Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina, Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa.
- * Resources and funds: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Alvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.
- * Software: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina
- * Monitoring: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig
- * Validation: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig,
- * Writing: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.
- * Editing: María del Carmen Rondal-Guanotasig, Diana Natalia Álvarez Pulupa, Nelly Daniela Espinoza Molina.

Ethical implications

The authors state that there are no ethical implications.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no financial and non-financial conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work presented.

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