

РОЗДІЛ II. ТЕОРІЯ ТА МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ (З ГАЛУЗЕЙ ЗНАНЬ)

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BEST PRACTICES OF SEL FROM U.S. SCHOOLS: INSIGHTS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN UKRAINE

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Key words: *Social and Emotional Learning, English Language teaching, education policy, psychosocial well-being, SEL implementation.*

The article focuses on effective education policies and innovative practices of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) integration into academic environments which can be implemented at the national level into the Ukrainian school system and followed by EL teachers to support language learners' well-being. SEL has become a focal point in U.S. education, gaining attention from educators, researchers, and policymakers. It emphasizes fostering self-awareness, social skills, and emotional well-being alongside academic development. SEL strategies include creating inclusive, supportive environments, explicit SEL instruction, and integrating SEL into academic tasks through cooperative learning and reflective exercises. Programs like the ASCD's Whole Child initiative redefine student success to encompass health, safety, engagement, and preparedness for life beyond school, while NCELA and Harmony Academy offer practical tools for implementing SEL in diverse contexts.

The research highlights SEL's role in improving academic performance, emotional resilience, and behavioral adjustment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SEL frameworks gained prominence as vital tools for navigating educational challenges. Federal initiatives and organizations like CASEL have supported widespread SEL adoption.

In English teaching, SEL can be integrated through strategies like pre-teaching key vocabulary to build confidence, using visuals to support understanding, and encouraging reflective activities like journaling. Activities such as cooperative storytelling and "Question of the Day" foster self-expression, empathy, and social awareness in language learners. Techniques such as daily check-ins, gratitude practices, and collaborative projects enable students to build emotional intelligence and responsible decision-making skills. Ukraine's school system needs comprehensive support, integrating global best practices and a national shift in attitudes to prioritize the mental health of children as a collective societal responsibility for a sustainable future.

НАЙКРАЩІ ПРАКТИКИ СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕМОЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ В АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ ШКОЛАХ: РЕКОМЕНДАЦІЇ ДЛЯ ВЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В УКРАЇНІ

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Ключові слова: соціально-емоційне навчання (СЕН), викладання англійської мови, освітня політика, психосоціальне благополуччя, застосування СЕН.

У статті розглянуто ефективні освітні політики та інноваційні практики інтеграції соціально-емоційного навчання (СЕН) в академічне середовище, які можуть бути запроваджені в українській шкільній системі та використані вчителями англійської мови для підтримки благополуччя своїх учнів. Імплементация СЕН у шкільну освіту США є центром уваги педагогів, дослідників і політиків. СЕН спрямоване на розвиток самосвідомості, соціальних навичок та емоційного благополуччя паралельно з академічним розвитком. Стратегії СЕН включають створення інклюзивного середовища, фокусування на розвитку соціально-емоційних компетентностей та інтеграцію СЕН в академічні завдання через кооперативне навчання та рефлексивні вправи. Освітні організації та програми (ініціатива ASCD Whole Child, NCELA, Harmony Academy), охоплюючи здоров'я, безпеку, залучення та готовність до життя учнів поза школою, пропонують практичні інструменти для впровадження СЕН у різноманітних контекстах. Дослідження підкреслює роль СЕН у покращенні академічної успішності та емоційної стійкості. Під час пандемії COVID-19 рекомендації щодо застосування СЕН стали життєво важливими інструментами для розв'язання освітніх завдань. Федеральні ініціативи та освітні організації (CASEL) підтримали широке впровадження СЕН.

Під час навчання англійської мови інтегрування СЕН забезпечується попереднім вивченням ключової лексики для формування впевненості, використанням візуальних засобів для підтримки розуміння та рефлексивною діяльністю (ведення щоденника). Створення спільної розповіді й завдання «Питання дня» сприяють самовираженню, емпатії та соціальній обізнаності. Щоденні перевірки емоційного стану учнів, практика вдячності та спільні проекти спрямовані на розвиток у школярів емоційного інтелекту і навичок відповідального прийняття рішень. Українська шкільна система потребує всебічної підтримки, інтеграції найкращих світових практик та національних змін у ставленні до пріоритетності психічного здоров'я дітей, що є колективною відповідальністю суспільства за стабільне майбутнє нації.

Statement of the problem. At present the Ukrainian education system faces a lot of challenges trying to help the young generation adapt to the war-time conditions and cope with trauma, violence, and chronic stress. It's vital to create a supportive school environment which sustains children's psychosocial well-being. Every day, teachers in Ukraine search for new materials, effective methods, and innovative ideas. Some of the crucial elements of effective education systems are influenced by a number of factors including knowledge sharing between all school communities, governmental guidelines and support of school teachers, education focused on real needs of pupils, teachers, and society, as well as concern for pupils with fewer chances. Despite admitting the fact that the present situation in the country is extremely challenging for teachers, schoolchildren and their parents, what the Ukrainian educators look for, however, is not new. What if some answers have always lain before our eyes?

One of the possible effective solutions is the consistent application of social-emotional learning (SEL) framework into schools which might be, on the one hand, a challenge of teaching and learning, but, on the other hand, it can be viewed as a different approach and reflection upon already existing teaching strategies. SEL is defined as the process through which individuals develop the necessary skills, attitudes, and values to acquire social-emotional competence [3, p. 2]. In the USA it became one of the answers to a very challenging question: What to do to support schools, newcomers and multilingual learners?

Analysis of recent research and publications. While the basics of SEL were introduced in 1990 by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, the research on the role of SEL in school education, particularly in English language teaching, has been conducted extensively for the last three decades. Theoretical and practical studies of SEL are presented in the works of (M. J. Elias, R. Dresser, L. J. Penton Herrera and G. Martinez-Alba, N. Yoder). Previous research has highlighted various trauma-informed teaching strategies, emphasizing the importance of establishing a secure and supportive atmosphere in the classroom (J. O'Loughlin and B. Custodio, J. Minahan, D. Zaccarian) [8; 14]. The results of some research proved a positive influence of SEL on children's school success (J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, H. J. Walberg) [15]. The definition of "transformative SEL" which is a form of SEL intended to promote equity and excellence among children, young people, and adults has been grounded. It focuses on issues of race/ethnicity as a first step toward addressing the broader range of extant inequities (R. J. Jagers, D. Rivas-Drake, B. Williams).

Educators and researchers of *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL), which is the leading SEL practice, policy

and research organization in the USA, created the basis for high-quality, evidence-based SEL and has made the case for SEL as an integral part of education. Their studies are devoted to the theoretical and practical aspects of *schoolwide SEL approach*, such as indicators of SEL, implementation timeline, rubrics, and other essential SEL tools [2]. "The Guide to schoolwide SEL" outlines an intentional, collaborative process for systemic SEL implementation. Celebrating the 30th anniversary of CASEL in 2024 its devoted educators, researchers and psychologists, supported by the US government, have made a considerable contribution by offering, analyzing, and implementing their ideas into the American school system. Nowadays, thanks to their valuable expertise, Ukrainian EL teachers have an opportunity to acquire this solid background knowledge which they can adapt and implement in their English classes.

The purpose of this article is to analyze some effective education policies and determine innovative practices and models of SEL integration into academic environments which can be implemented at the national level into the Ukrainian school system and followed by EL teachers to support language learners' well-being through developing their SEL competencies.

Presentation of the main research material. The SEL issue is constantly in the focus of EL teachers, pre-service and in-service EL teacher trainers and research is conducted extensively as dynamic changes in education require sensible solutions. One of the priority areas of TESOL 2024 Convention in Tampa, Florida was SEL and formation of intercultural competence, inclusion in education, the ways to ensure that every child in every school has access to what they need to participate fully in every community that they call home, and the role of educators in today's global world.

There have been many innovations in the research around promoting SEL for schoolchildren in the USA. To begin with, the U.S. Department of Education supports a number of technical assistance centers to provide content expertise and resources to assist with implementation of federal programs that support students' social emotional and behavioral needs [7; 11; 12]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the framework of social-emotional and behavioral learning developed as a focal point of inquiry and application among educators, researchers, policy reformers, and other stakeholders in the field of education. It has been identified as a pivotal mechanism for enhancing students' academic performance and optimizing educational outcomes. Empirical evidence underscores the correlation between social and emotional competencies and both academic achievement and behavioral adjustment, highlighting their role as protective factors for vulnerable populations. Addressing the

social-emotional wellbeing of students – as well as the educators and professionals who support them – has become increasingly imperative as educational institutions, families, and learners navigated the complexities of instruction during a public health crisis of national significance.

A recent national survey of educators and principals reveals a record-high implementation of SEL in K-12 schools. By the 2023–24 academic year, 83 percent of school principals reported incorporating an SEL curriculum in their schools. This reflects consistent growth compared to 76 percent in 2021–22 and 46 percent in 2017–18. Additionally, findings from the CASEL and RAND report “Social and Emotional Learning in U.S. Schools” reveal that 49 states and the District of Columbia have implemented at least one policy or condition that actively supports and promotes SEL in schools [10].

In U.S. schools where SEL is effectively integrated, there are practices and programs grounded in research that foster: 1) **supportive relationships**: activities like “morning meetings” or brief check-ins with staff mentors help students develop supportive connections with both peers and adults; 2) **skill application in academics**: students practice social and emotional competencies, such as teamwork and self-reflection, while engaging in academic tasks, like collaboratively solving math problems; 3) **age-appropriate instruction**: instruction tailored to students’ developmental stages teaches and reinforces skills, such as forming friendships or managing stress; 4) **adult modeling**: teachers and staff demonstrate social and emotional skills in their behavior while actively seeking ways to assist students. In a school with effective SEL implementation, you’ll often see evidence-based programs and practices.

Moreover, there are different education non-profit organizations in the USA with considerable instructional and innovation expertise which focus on successful learners supporting SEL approaches and integrating SEL into everyday school life and every teacher’s class.

First, *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development* (ASCD), which supports educators in designing high-quality learning experiences for all students, initiated the *Whole Child approach to education* [1]. Within its framework a successful learner is redefined not as one “whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests” but rather as one “who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling”.

The ASCD’s *Whole Child approach* has five principles: a pupil should be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. In other words, each child enters school healthy and learns about and practises

a healthy lifestyle; learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe; is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community; has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults; and is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

Second, *National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition* (NCELA) supports the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA) in its mission to respond to educational needs of English learners (ELs). NCELA collects, coordinates, and conveys a broad range of research and resources in support of an inclusive approach to high quality education for ELs. To fulfill its mission, NCELA supports high quality networking among state-level administrators and serves other stakeholders involved in EL education, including teachers and other practitioners, parents, university faculty, administrators, and federal policymakers [6].

NCELA developed the *English Learner Tool Kit*, which is intended to help state and local education agencies meet their obligations to ELs. This impressive report includes explanations of the civil rights and other legal obligations to ELs, checklists as self-monitoring tools, sample tools and additional resources to aid with compliance. Stating that establishing a welcoming school climate is a key to preparing students for success in college, careers, and civic life, it provides various tools for creating an inclusive environment for and avoiding the unnecessary segregation of ELs and ensuring meaningful communication with limited English proficient parents [5]. It encourages schools to promote diversity, prevent bullying and harassment, and focus on helping students develop social-emotional skills like conflict resolution. This includes training staff, involving families and communities, and fostering interaction between ELs and non-ELs through inclusive programs like two-way immersion.

Third, *Harmony Academy*, a recipient of the prestigious Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant, is leading the development of Harmony SEL-Academic Integration, an innovative model that embeds the Harmony Curriculum more deeply into academic instruction, particularly in schools serving historically underrepresented students. Originally established at Arizona State University in 2008 and transitioning to National University in 2014, *Harmony Academy* has undergone rigorous evaluation by SEL experts, earning its designation as a CASEL SElect program. Today, it supports 57,000 schools and organizations, impacting over 18 million students across all 50 states and 88 countries [4].

Being a program centered on building student social and emotional competencies through relationship-driven strategies [13] *Harmony Academy* provides educators with comprehensive, on-demand classroom resources that foster healthy relationships, celebrate diversity and inclusion, and inspire active, engaged learning, paving the way for positive life-long outcomes. The core curriculum is accessible online for free, with additional resources planned for future release. Initially created to promote meaningful and harmonious interactions among students who might not typically connect in classroom settings, *Harmony* focuses on explicitly teaching the social and emotional skills essential for self-awareness and interpersonal engagement. For guiding the lessons they suggest helpful structures: *Set the Stage, Facilitate the Activity, and Review and Reflect*. Educators have found these lessons highly engaging and effective in supporting students' development of crucial SEL competencies thanks to everyday *meet-up and buddy up practices*. *Meet-Up* incorporates a structured process designed to ensure that every student feels acknowledged and heard, address classroom challenges collaboratively, and prepare students to engage in the next activity effectively. *Meet-Up* establishes a consistent daily routine where students can share their experiences, get to know their peers, exchange ideas, celebrate achievements, and collaboratively address any challenges and includes four steps (Greeting, Sharing and Responding, Checking In, and Connecting). Participating in the *Buddy Up*, guides students to reflect on the purpose of the conversations and activities while reinforcing the SEL competencies they apply during the experience.

Harmony Academy actively supports educators by offering free, engaging webinars designed to deepen their understanding of SEL and provide practical strategies for implementing SEL in schools and organizations globally. When consistently and effectively applied, these practices yield significant benefits, including improved communication and empathy between students, reduced aggression, and enhanced academic performance – benefits that extend into adolescence and adulthood. One of the impactful themes covered in webinars is “The Art of Gratitude” focusing on strategies to enhance joy, health, and relationships through intentional gratitude practices, creating more successful learning experiences. Gratitude is viewed as a part of SEL as it regulates emotions, helps to cope with stress and activates learning. Practicing gratitude in learning communities presupposes firstly nurturing in pupils basic positive traits that further lead to gratitude, secondly displaying gratitude behavior on teacher’s part so that students could understand how to experience and express it. Educators teach students how to infuse gratitude into everyday life by sharing their cases as well as

organising lesson practices: welcoming inclusive activity, engaging strategies, intentional close (reflection on what has been done and thinking forward on what is planned). One of the approaches to teaching expressing gratitude is through creating images when asking students to notice and model what gratitude may sound or look like. Being specific and authentic, showing real moments of gratitude (e.g. *thank you for following my directions, for showing up, for active participation, for creative ideas, for input* etc.) getting pupils to recognize others being grateful teachers set the stage for the positive outlook and resilience.

To implement SEL effectively in English classes, it is essential to create a safe and welcoming space to build student confidence and get to know them better. This is particularly important for special groups, such as refugees, unaccompanied minors, and children in migrant farmworker families. Teachers should identify the key concepts and vocabulary that will form the focus of each lesson and pre-teach these to help students engage meaningfully with the content. Using visuals, hands-on objects, and other tools can further support the understanding of new concepts and vocabulary.

Let us explore how each of the five competencies – Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible decision-making – can be developed through specific activities and practices during an English Language lesson. One effective strategy to foster *self-awareness* and reflection in students is the incorporation of a “*Question of the Day*” activity. This approach encourages students to engage in reflective thinking about their daily experiences and interpersonal interactions. Questions can be posed in various formats (verbally, in written form, or anonymously) depending on what best supports the classroom environment. Examples of reflective prompts include: “*Describe your ideal after-school activity,*” “*Recall a kind comment from a peer and your response to it,*” or “*What qualities do you most appreciate in your best friend?*” Such activities contribute to a positive SEL environment throughout the academic year.

Incorporating daily check-ins with students is a powerful strategy to develop *self-management, social awareness* while fostering personal connections and enhancing learning outcomes. Encouraging students to check in with each other as well promotes a sense of community and mutual support. Taking a few moments at the beginning of the day or class period to discuss topics of interest both within and beyond school can set a positive tone. Engaging activities such as fun “*would you rather*” questions or a *show-and-tell session* that involves bringing an object, item, or personal story to class and sharing it with their peers through a brief presentation, allow students to share and connect (e.g. *Would you*

rather eat pizza or scrambled eggs for breakfast? Why? Would you rather live in a tree house or an underground cave? Why? Would you rather take a trip to the mountains or to the beach? Why?). These interactions not only bring joy but also create opportunities for students to engage with and learn from one another.

To develop *social awareness*, teachers can model acceptance of others with different attitudes and values, fostering an environment of inclusivity. Strategically incorporating cooperative learning and project-based learning allows students to work in diverse groups, promoting understanding and empathy. Thoughtful reflection on the composition of groups can further enhance this process by encouraging students to collaborate with peers from varied backgrounds.

To effectively develop *relationship skills* in students, teachers can implement a variety of strategies focused on enhancing both speaking and listening abilities. One approach is to teach lessons that emphasize clear communication, such as identifying and organizing one's message, introducing oneself confidently, and speaking loudly and clearly so others can hear. Additionally, lessons on effective listening can be integrated into the curriculum, providing students with opportunities to practice these skills through activities like *pair shares*, where students take turns listening and responding. Incorporating team-based, collaborative teaching practices such as *cooperative learning* and *project-based learning* can also help students refine their relationship skills. Additionally, modeling good conflict resolution techniques and offering students opportunities for pair shares or small group discussions can further foster the development of strong relationship skills.

To foster responsible *decision-making* in students, a structured formula can be taught to guide them through making thoughtful choices. A helpful method might involve a series of steps, such as *stopping to pause and reflect, calming down, identifying the problem, considering possible alternatives, making a choice, trying it out, and then re-evaluating the decision*. Teachers can define key concepts such as responsibility, ethics, safety, values, and honesty, encouraging students to explore these ideas through activities like writing essays or engaging in discussions. Educators should consistently model sound decision-making by demonstrating the steps involved in making good choices. When students face decisions, guiding them through the process and offering support as they work through their options is crucial. Lastly, providing authentic feedback when students make responsible decisions reinforces the value of careful decision-making and motivates them to continue making thoughtful choices.

This year, in response to dynamic changes in education and the latest research insights in the field, "The Guide to schoolwide SEL" by CASEL has

been updated to offer the latest actionable classroom strategies, resources, and tools to support educators as they apply SEL concepts [9]. First, new research-based, ready-to-implement tools and examples of what strategies could look like and sound like in practice have been added. The concept of "three-legged stool" of SEL, whose legs support the classroom, is used to categorize these resources: the first leg stands for a supportive classroom environment, the second leg – explicit SEL instruction, the third leg – integration of SEL and instruction. The new tools are organized around each leg of the "three-legged stool", which show how a systemic approach to high-quality SEL can be embedded through the classroom environment and instruction.

Second, the ways educators can partner with young people to better understand their experience of school and co-create strategies for improvement and strengthening the learning environment have been elevated (e.g. developing class routines and responsibilities). By engaging students in the learning design and making their voices central to the classroom experience, educators can incorporate the focal constructs of identity, agency, belonging, collaborative problem-solving, and curiosity to honor the strengths and needs of all students, especially those farthest from opportunity.

Third, the guidance about integrating SEL with academic instruction by taking a student-centered approach has been expanded (e.g. 10 phrases to build positive academic mindsets). The language which teachers use during instruction and their responsiveness to student input about what and how they are learning is a key way that teachers model social and emotional competence and contribute to students' sense of agency, self-awareness, and belonging.

Conclusions and prospects for further developments in this area. To sum up, SEL is a priority in U.S. education, supported by research, federal programs, and initiatives like the ASCD's *Whole Child* approach and CASEL's updated SEL guidance. SEL integrates skills like self-awareness, social awareness, and responsible decision-making into academic instruction, fostering inclusivity and enhancing students' academic and emotional well-being. Programs such as *Harmony Academy* and NCELA's resources promote practices like daily check-ins, cooperative learning, and gratitude activities to build supportive, diverse, and engaging classroom environments. Effective language activities and practices foster SEL core competencies simultaneously enhancing English language skills. The increasing adoption of SEL in schools reflects its role in improving academic performance, developing empathy, and dealing with challenges like chronic absenteeism. These strategies empower educators to address students' needs holistically while preparing them for success in a globalized world.

Ukraine's school system requires comprehensive support to ensure its survival and foster a vision for a sustainable future. The younger generation, striving to build resilience, necessitates the systematic evaluation and integration of global best practices in educational

policy within the framework of government directives. A paradigm shift in attitudes at the national level is imperative, as safeguarding the mental health of Ukrainian children must transcend the sole responsibility of educators and become a collective societal commitment.

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