Fostering Social-Emotional Competencies Through English Instruction: A Case Study of SEL Integration in Chinese Primary Schools

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Abstract

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has gained global recognition for enhancing students' holistic development, yet its implementation in non-Western educational contexts remains underexplored. This mixed-methods case study investigates the integration of SEL principles into English language instruction at a Chinese primary school, addressing a significant gap in understanding how CASEL's five core competencies can support language acquisition in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. Through in-depth interviews with three English teachers and systematic classroom observations, this study identified three primary challenges: student disengagement, proficiency disparities, and outdated instructional approaches. Following implementation of an integrated SEL-English curriculum based on CASEL's framework, classroom observations revealed significant improvements in student engagement, peer collaboration, and language participation. Specifically, incorporating self-awareness and self-management activities addressed attention difficulties, while social awareness and relationship-focused strategies mitigated proficiency gaps through structured peer support. This study contributes to both theoretical understanding of SEL application in subject-specific contexts and practical knowledge for language educators. The findings suggest that systematic integration of SEL principles can transform primary English instruction while supporting China's educational goals of cultivating well-rounded talents with both linguistic competence and social-emotional skills. The results have important implications for teacher education programs, curriculum development, and educational policy in emerging SEL contexts.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); English Education; Primary School

1. Introduction

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a cornerstone of educational reform globally, with particular significance for elementary education where foundational emotional competencies are established. Research indicates that early childhood, especially in lower primary grades, represents a critical period for emotional development that substantially influences future academic trajectories and overall well-being (Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012). Emotional education not only helps students develop positive affective attitudes but also enhances self-confidence and intrinsic motivation for learning. As China advances its educational modernization agenda in the 21st century, developing students' social-emotional competencies has become integral to national educational priorities that seek to align citizen development with broader societal goals (Chen, X & Hu, H, 2024). In this context, students must develop capabilities to navigate complex social and emotional challenges, with SEL offering a structured approach that aligns with both language acquisition goals and broader educational objectives.

This mixed-methods case study investigates two critical research questions: (1) What is the current state of English instruction at L Primary School with respect to social-emotional dimensions? and (2) How can the integration of social-emotional learning principles enhance English language teaching effectiveness in this context? To address these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with three English teachers from grades one through three at L Primary School, systematically identifying key instructional challenges. Subsequently, an integrated SEL-English curriculum intervention was implemented and observed, with both student feedback and classroom dynamics analyzed through a structured observation protocol based on CASEL's five core competencies.

This study makes several significant contributions to the literature on SEL implementation and language instruction. First, it addresses the notable gap in research examining SEL integration in non-Western educational contexts, particularly in Chinese primary education where English is taught as a foreign language. Second, it offers empirically-based instructional strategies for language teachers seeking to incorporate social-emotional dimensions into their pedagogy. Third, it extends theoretical understanding of how CASEL's five core competencies can be operationalized within subject-specific teaching rather than as standalone curriculum components. These contributions have important implications for teacher education, curriculum development, and educational policy in contexts where SEL approaches are still emerging.

2. Literature Review

The integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into educational curricula has gained significant momentum globally, driven by substantial evidence supporting its positive impact on student development. This review synthesizes the existing literature by first establishing the robust empirical foundation for the benefits of SEL. It then narrows its focus to the specific integration of SEL within subject-specific pedagogy, particularly in language education. Subsequently, it examines the critical role of implementation fidelity and the cultural adaptation

required for SEL effectiveness in diverse contexts. Finally, by identifying key research gaps, this review establishes the rationale and contribution of the present study.

2.1. The Empirical Foundation and Broad Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning

A vast body of international research has firmly established the value of school-based SEL programs. A seminal meta-analysis synthesized findings from 213 programs involving over 270,000 students, provides the most compelling evidence to date. The study demonstrated that SEL interventions led to statistically significant improvements across multiple domains: students' social-emotional competencies (mean effect size = 0.57), attitudes toward self and others (mean effect size = 0.23), positive social behaviors (mean effect size = 0.24), and academic performance, with an average gain of 11 percentile points (mean effect size = 0.27).(J. Durlak et al., 2011) Further large-scale syntheses have reinforced these conclusions, establishing a global consensus that well-implemented SEL programs yield multidimensional benefits for students(John Payton et al., 2008).

2.2. The Integration of SEL into Language Education

Building on the general benefits of SEL, a growing area of inquiry explores its integration into specific academic subjects, including language education. The rationale is that embedding SEL into core instruction can create a synergistic effect, where emotional and social development enhances academic learning, and vice versa. In the context of language acquisition, competencies like self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills are inherently linked to the processes of communication and cultural understanding. Scholars argue that enhanced emotional intelligence can lower the "affective filter," reducing language learning anxiety and thereby boosting participation and proficiency(Tevdovska, 2017).

For instance, researchers argued that integrating SEL into English instruction through specific strategies can bolster students' self-awareness and emotional regulation, which in turn improves language learning outcomes.(Bai et al., 2024) Similarly, within the Chinese context, Zhu (2022) developed a conceptual framework asserting that SEL integration can enhance three key dimensions of English learning: cultural awareness, self-development capacity, and social engagement. While these frameworks are compelling, empirical studies that test these proposed mechanisms and measure their direct impact on language proficiency remain an emerging area of research, signalling a need for more classroom-based investigations.

2.3. Implementation, Context, and Cultural Adaptation in China

While the potential of SEL is clear, its effectiveness is highly contingent on its adaptation to specific contexts. The non-Western context, particularly China, is not merely a different location but represents a distinct cultural and educational ecosystem that reshapes how SEL is understood and implemented. Unlike the individualistic underpinnings of many Western SEL models, Chinese education is deeply rooted in collectivist values and a strong tradition of moral education (deyu), which emphasizes collective harmony and social responsibility(An et al., 2021; Ping et al., 2004). Furthermore, the high-stakes pressure of the national college entrance examination (gaokao) often leads to a curriculum that heavily prioritizes academic knowledge over socio-emotional skills, posing a significant barrier to implementation.

Consequently, a direct transplantation of Western SEL frameworks is widely seen as ineffective. Instead, a process of cultural adaptation is underway. A prime example is the adaptation of the influential framework from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Rather than simply adopting CASEL's five competencies, Chinese researchers and educators are actively mapping them onto the indigenous "Core Competencies" (hexin suzhi) framework promulgated by the Ministry of Education.

Despite this promising theoretical work, empirical research on the ground remains limited but growing. Qualitative studies, such as that by Chen (2024), have explored the implementation of school-based SEL curricula in China, revealing that while teachers recognize the value of SEL, they struggle to balance it with intense academic pressures. The few available quantitative studies, such as the one by Gong (2022) showing positive effects on social skills and engagement, are often small-scale (N=126) and conducted in well-resourced urban districts. This raises critical questions about the scalability and generalizability of such interventions across China's vast and heterogeneous educational landscape, highlighting a gap between conceptual adaptation and validated, large-scale implementation.

This synthesis reveals several critical gaps in the existing literature that the present study aims to address. Chief among them is the scarcity of empirical studies that implement and evaluate culturally-adapted models; while the adaptation of frameworks like CASEL to China's hexin suyang is discussed theoretically, its application in real-world classrooms remains under-researched. This is particularly true for subject-integrated strategies, as few studies have developed and assessed specific pedagogical practices for integrating SEL into primary school English instruction, despite scholars advocating for it as a feasible approach. Compounding these issues, the underlying process by which a culturally-adapted SEL model influences language engagement and proficiency within the unique pressures of the Chinese educational system is not yet well understood, highlighting a need for research that examines not only if these strategies work, but how they work in context.

3. Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing SEL Integration in Primary English Education

This study operationalizes Social-Emotional Learning through the theoretical framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), established in 1994 (Du et al., 2019). CASEL's approach, significantly influenced by Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, conceptualizes SEL as a developmental process through which individuals acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, establish and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Chang, 2020).

The research design is structured around CASEL's five core competencies, which provide both conceptual clarity and analytical utility for examining SEL integration in educational contexts. Each competency represents a distinct dimension of social-emotional development while simultaneously functioning as part of an interconnected system of skills and dispositions (Osher et al., 2016).

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, values, and strengths and weaknesses, and to maintain a realistic sense of self-efficacy and optimism. In language learning contexts, this includes students' awareness of their emotional responses to unfamiliar linguistic challenges and recognition of their language learning strengths and limitations.

Self-management refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations, including stress management, impulse control, and goal setting. For language learners, this involves maintaining attention during instruction, persisting through difficulties in comprehension or production, and setting realistic language acquisition goals.

Social awareness is the capacity to understand and empathize with individuals from diverse backgrounds, recognize social and cultural norms, and identify available support networks and resources. In language education, this extends to cultural awareness and appreciation of diverse linguistic practices.

Relationship skills involve the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships, communicate effectively, listen actively, cooperate, resist peer pressure, negotiate conflicts, and seek help when needed. These skills are particularly relevant in communicative language teaching approaches that emphasize interactive learning.

Responsible decision-making is the ability to make informed choices by evaluating the potential consequences of actions, considering well-being, ethical standards, safety, and social norms. For language learners, this includes making appropriate choices about language use in varied social contexts.

This framework provides analytical categories for examining the challenges faced in primary English education and structuring the development and implementation of integrated SEL-English instructional approaches. By mapping observed classroom dynamics and teaching strategies to these five competencies, the study can systematically analyze both existing practices and potential areas for enhancement.

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Questions and Objectives

This study investigates two primary research questions:

What social-emotional dimensions are evident in current English instruction at L Primary School, and what challenges do teachers face in addressing students' social-emotional needs?

How can systematic integration of SEL principles enhance English language teaching effectiveness and student engagement in this context?

These questions address the identified research gap regarding SEL implementation in Chinese language education contexts and aim to generate both theoretical insights and practical strategies for teacher education.

4.2 Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating multiple procedures to ensure research rigor and trustworthiness. The research was conducted at a public primary school in Beijing. The school is located in an urban area and serves a student population with a relatively diverse but generally middle-class socio-economic background. Each class typically consists of around 40 students, which is a common class size in urban Chinese primary schools. The participating teachers had varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from 4 to 20 years, and all held professional teaching certifications. Before the research, teachers are provided integrated SEL-English curriculum based on CASEL's framework and familiar with the curriculum. Data collected from semi-structured interviews and systematic classroom observations were triangulated to enhance the validity of the findings. Furthermore, potential researcher bias was mitigated through peer debriefing, and inter-coder reliability was established to ensure consistency in the data analysis process. This methodological framework is consistent with prior investigations of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) implementation and is specifically adapted to the context of primary education in China.

Data collection proceeded in two sequential phases. In Phase One, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with three English teachers (grades 1-3) at L Primary School (see Table 1 for participant demographics). The interview protocol comprised 11 questions systematically aligned with CASEL's five core competencies: self-awareness (questions 1-2), self-management (questions 3-4), social awareness (questions 5-6), relationship skills (questions 7-8), and responsible decision-making (question 9). Two additional questions addressed general teaching challenges and resource needs. Interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes, were audio-recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Member checking was employed to ensure transcription accuracy.

In Phase Two, an integrated SEL-English curriculum informed by challenges identified in Phase One was implemented and observed. Classroom observations employed a structured protocol adapted from two validated instruments: Yoder's (2014) Teacher Social-Emotional Teaching and Ability Self-Assessment Tool and Gong's (2022) SEL observation scale. Following content validation by three educational experts specializing in SEL, the original ten-indicator framework was refined to nine indicators that specifically addressed the research questions. The "balanced instruction" indicator was eliminated due to limited relevance to SEL dimensions based on expert feedback. Inter-rater reliability was established through parallel observations with two trained observers (Cohen's kappa = 0.87).

Table 1. Interview Information

Interviewee	Subject	Title	Teaching Age	Interview Time
Teacher1	English	Intermediate teacher	20 years	1.5 hour
Teacher2	English	Intermediate teacher	8 years	1hour
Teacher3	English	Intermediate teacher	4 years	1hour

The refined observation framework includes indicators designed to create a positive and supportive learning environment, such as "Teacher language," "Warmth and support," and "Academic press and expectations." Additionally, "Responsibility and choice" aligns with SEL's focus on responsible decision-making, while "Cooperative learning" and "Classroom discussions" correspond to SEL's emphasis on relationship skills. Indicators like "Self-assessment and self-reflection" and "Student-centered discipline" are linked to the self-management domain of SEL, while "Competence building" addresses both academic and SEL skill development.

5. Results: Examining SEL Dimensions in Primary English Instruction

5.1. Thematic Analysis of Teacher Interviews

Analysis of interview data revealed three consistent themes across all participants: (1) recognition of limitations in traditional instructional approaches, (2) identification of student behavioral and engagement challenges, and (3) intuitive but unsystematic application of SEL-aligned strategies to address these challenges. The following sections examine these themes through the lens of CASEL's five core competencies, illustrated with representative excerpts from participant interviews.

5.1.1. Self-Awareness and Self-Management Challenges

Self-management challenges emerged as a primary concern across all grade levels. Teacher 1 (Grade 1) reported significant engagement difficulties: "In each of my six classes, I consistently observe 4-5 students who cannot maintain attention for more than 10 minutes. They sleep, draw, or play with items in their desks." This observation illustrates the self-regulation difficulties that young language learners experience, particularly in a context where English represents an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural system. A specific case highlighted by Teacher 1 involved a student with physical disabilities who demonstrated significant impulse control challenges: "He frequently leaves his seat during instruction, approaches the teacher's desk, and interrupts ongoing activities." These behaviors reflect difficulties with the self-management competencies of impulse control and emotional regulation, which CASEL identifies as foundational for academic engagement.

Teacher 3 highlighted the increasing prevalence of psychological challenges that affect self-awareness: "I've noticed more students struggling with anxiety about English learning. One particular student in my class constantly hesitates to answer questions because she's afraid of making mistakes. When she does make an error, she becomes extremely self-critical and sometimes refuses to participate further." This example illustrates deficits in emotional self-awareness and accurate self-perception, which impedes language learning progress. In response, Teacher 3 reported adapting her approach: "I've learned to use a gentler tone with this student and provide more affirmation even for partial answers. This seems to reduce her anxiety somewhat, but I wish I had more structured strategies to help build her confidence."

5.1.2. Social Awareness and Relationship Skills

Interview data suggested that relationship skills and social awareness presented both challenges and opportunities in the English classroom. Teacher 2, who taught third-grade students, noted a considerable disparity in English proficiency within her class: "Some students use expressions well beyond our curriculum, while others struggle with basic vocabulary we covered months ago. This creates tension during pair work or group activities because stronger students become impatient with peers who can't keep up." This observation highlights how proficiency disparities can complicate the development of relationship skills such as cooperation and communication.

However, teachers also recognized the potential of leveraging relationship skills to enhance learning. Teacher 2 reflected: "When I organize activities where stronger students help teach concepts to others, I see improvements in both groups. The helpers develop patience and communication skills, while the struggling students often understand better from peers than from me." This insight suggests an intuitive understanding of how social dynamics can support language learning, though teachers reported lacking systematic approaches to structuring these interactions for optimal outcomes.

5.1.3. Responsible Decision-Making

The interviews revealed limited explicit attention to responsible decision-making in current English instruction. When asked about how they help students make responsible choices, teachers primarily focused on behavioral compliance rather than ethical reasoning or consequential thinking. Teacher 1 noted: "I mainly emphasize following class rules and completing assignments on time. We don't have much opportunity to address deeper decision-making in our curriculum." This suggests a potential area for growth in SEL integration, as responsible decision-making extends beyond compliance to include critical thinking about language choices and cultural implications.

5.2. Challenges in English Teaching

The data revealed three principal challenges in primary English instruction at L Primary School, each with distinct social-emotional dimensions:

5.2.1. Self-Awareness and Self-Management Challenges

The data revealed significant challenges related to students' self-awareness and self-management capabilities that directly impacted English learning. Teachers reported that approximately 15-20% of students across all grade levels demonstrated consistent difficulties in maintaining attention during English instruction. Teacher 1 noted that "in each of my six classes, one or two students regularly fall asleep during lessons," indicating challenges with self-awareness of learning engagement. Teacher 2 provided quantitative evidence of self-management difficulties, reporting that "while homework completion rates in most subjects range from 85% to 90%, English assignment completion in some classes drops to approximately 70%." This disparity suggests that students struggle more with self-management specifically in the English language learning context.

The interviews uncovered several factors contributing to these self-management challenges. First, as English is not students' first language, they must build language skills from fundamental levels, requiring substantial cognitive resources and sustained attention. Second, some students develop simplified approaches to language learning, viewing it primarily as vocabulary memorization. When the curriculum advances to more complex communicative tasks, these students experience frustration and disengagement. Teacher 3 observed: "Many students who performed well in earlier grades begin to struggle when we move from vocabulary drills to actual communication. They don't have strategies to manage this transition, and their frustration often manifests as disruptive behavior or withdrawal."

5.2.2. Proficiency Disparities and Social Dynamics

All three teachers identified significant proficiency disparities within their classrooms, which created challenges for both instruction and peer relationships. Teacher 2 reported that in the third-grade final English exam, while 97% of students passed, 21% received C grades, and only 16% achieved full marks. These disparities created social dynamics that often reinforced existing gaps: high-performing students tended to interact primarily with each other during English activities, while struggling students became increasingly marginalized.

The teachers identified two primary factors contributing to these disparities. First, home environment played a crucial role, with students from more supportive and resource-rich home environments demonstrating stronger English performance. Second, cognitive differences among students led to varied aptitudes for language learning. As Teacher 1 explained: "Some students naturally excel in language acquisition while struggling with subjects like mathematics. Others show the opposite pattern. These cognitive differences become apparent in the classroom and can significantly impact students' engagement with English learning."

5.2.3. Instructional Approaches and Teacher Development

The interview data revealed that instructional approaches constituted a third significant challenge. All three teachers acknowledged limitations in current teaching methods, with Teacher 3 noting that "some colleagues continue to rely almost exclusively on textbook recitation and traditional grammar exercises, with minimal interactive components." This observation highlights a gap between contemporary language teaching theories, which emphasize communicative competence, and actual classroom practices that often remain teacher-centered and text-focused.

Teachers also reported limited professional development opportunities specifically focused on integrating social-emotional dimensions into language instruction. Teacher 2 reflected: "We receive general pedagogical training, but very little guidance on addressing the emotional aspects of language learning or creating emotionally supportive classroom environments. When students experience anxiety or frustration with English, I mostly rely on intuition rather than specific strategies." This suggests a need for targeted professional development that bridges language pedagogy with social-emotional learning principles.

6. Discussion

6.1. Enhancing Student Interest Through Self-Awareness and Self-Management

The findings reveal significant potential for addressing student engagement challenges through systematic integration of self-awareness and self-management dimensions of SEL. The observed disengagement patterns-including students sleeping during class, completing other subjects' work during English instruction, and displaying anxiety about participation-directly correspond to deficits in self-awareness (recognizing one's emotional state during learning) and self-management (regulating attention and behavior). This aligns with Gong's (2022) findings that SEL-integrated activities significantly enhance student engagement through increased self-regulatory capacity, though the current study extends this work by specifically examining the language learning context.

The classroom implementation phase of the study demonstrated that incorporating creative and interactive activities specifically designed to develop self-awareness and self-management skills had measurable effects on student engagement. When reflective journaling about emotions experienced during English learning (self-awareness) and specific attention-focusing techniques (self-management) were introduced, increased on-task behavior and participation rates were observed. As Teacher 1 noted after implementing these strategies: "The reflective activities helped students recognize when they were becoming disengaged or frustrated, which seemed to help them regulate these responses more effectively."

Additionally, expanding students' cultural awareness through culturally responsive content enhanced both motivation and self-awareness. For example, when addressing traditional festivals, teachers incorporated proverbs or expressions related to these festivals in both English and Chinese. This approach helped students connect new language content to familiar cultural contexts, making the learning process more accessible and personally meaningful. This finding aligns with previous research by Zhu (2022), who found that culturally integrated SEL approaches enhanced students' engagement with foreign language content.

6.2. Addressing Proficiency Disparities Through Social Awareness and Relationship Skills

The pronounced proficiency disparities observed in this study (with 21% of Grade 3 students receiving C grades despite a 97% pass rate) reflect challenges that extend beyond conventional pedagogical approaches. The findings suggest that social awareness and relationship skills-two key SEL competencies-offer promising avenues for addressing these disparities. Through collaborative learning structures where more proficient students support peers, teachers can leverage social dynamics to create what Vygotsky (1978) termed "zones of proximal development." This approach was exemplified when Teacher 2 implemented mixed-ability grouping with stronger students as "language ambassadors," resulting in increased participation from previously disengaged students.

During the implementation phase, it was observed that strategic grouping based on varied proficiency levels, combined with explicit instruction in peer coaching techniques, significantly enhanced learning outcomes for struggling students. For example, when stronger students were taught specific ways to provide feedback and encouragement to peers (relationship skills) and to

recognize signs of confusion or frustration in others (social awareness), collaborative activities became more productive for all participants. As one student remarked: "I understand better when my classmate explains it, and she doesn't make me feel bad when I make mistakes."

These findings extend previous research by Bai et al. (2021), who found that SEL-integrated language instruction enhanced peer relationships. However, this study specifically demonstrates how structured approaches to developing relationship skills and social awareness can directly address the challenge of proficiency disparities in Chinese primary English education contexts.

6.3. Improving Teacher Professional Development

The findings highlight the critical role of teacher self-awareness and social awareness in effective SEL integration. The observation that all three participating teachers intuitively incorporated some SEL elements without systematic understanding suggests that teacher education programs should explicitly develop teachers' metacognitive awareness of these practices. As Schon's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action" suggests, teachers who develop heightened awareness of their own social-emotional practices can more effectively model and teach these competencies. The practice at L Primary School of requiring at least 20 peer observations per semester represents a promising structural support for developing this reflective capacity, though the data suggest these observations would benefit from explicit SEL-focused protocols.

The implementation phase revealed that teachers benefit from specific professional development in three areas: (1) recognizing and responding to students' emotional states during language learning, (2) designing activities that intentionally develop specific SEL competencies while addressing language objectives, and (3) managing their own emotional responses to challenging classroom situations. This third area proved particularly important, as Teacher 1 noted: "I realized that my own frustration with disengaged students was often visible to the class and actually reinforced negative patterns. Learning to regulate my emotional expressions has created a more positive atmosphere."

These findings align with research by Li et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of teacher emotional competence in successful SEL implementation. However, the current study extends this work by identifying specific professional development needs for language teachers in the Chinese context, where traditional teacher-centered pedagogies remain influential despite curriculum reforms emphasizing student-centered approaches.

6.4. Future Research Directions

This study reveals several promising avenues for future research on SEL integration in language education contexts. First, longitudinal studies examining the sustained impact of SEL-integrated language instruction on both language proficiency and social-emotional development would provide valuable insights into long-term outcomes. Second, comparative studies across different grade levels, socioeconomic contexts, and geographical regions within China would help identify contextual factors that influence SEL implementation effectiveness. Third, research specifically examining how different aspects of language acquisition (e.g., vocabulary

development, oral communication, reading comprehension) interact with specific SEL competencies could inform more targeted integration approaches.

Additionally, future research should investigate how teacher education programs and professional development initiatives can most effectively prepare language teachers to integrate SEL principles into their instruction. This includes examining both pre-service teacher education curricula and in-service professional development models to identify optimal approaches for developing teachers' capacity to implement SEL-integrated language instruction.

7. Conclusions

This study examined the integration of Social-Emotional Learning principles into English language instruction at a Chinese primary school, addressing the notable gap in research on SEL implementation in non-Western educational contexts. The findings demonstrate that significant challenges in primary English instruction - including student disengagement, proficiency disparities, and outdated teaching methodologies - can be effectively addressed through systematic integration of CASEL's five core competencies. Specifically, the development of self-awareness and self-management skills appears to enhance student engagement with language learning, while social awareness and relationship skills offer promising approaches for addressing proficiency disparities through collaborative learning structures.

The theoretical and practical contributions of this study are threefold. First, it extends SEL research into the specific context of Chinese primary English education, demonstrating both the cultural adaptability and subject-specific applications of CASEL's framework. Second, it provides empirically-grounded strategies for teachers seeking to integrate social-emotional dimensions into language instruction, particularly in contexts where English represents a foreign language. Third, it highlights the importance of teacher self-awareness and reflective practice in successful SEL implementation, suggesting implications for teacher education programs and professional development structures.

Several limitations warrant consideration when interpreting these findings. First, the case study methodology employed at a single primary school limits generalizability, particularly given China's diverse educational contexts. Second, the relatively short implementation period restricts the ability to assess long-term impacts of SEL integration on language proficiency and social-emotional development. Third, the absence of quantitative measures of student outcomes precludes statistical analysis of intervention effectiveness. Future research should address these limitations through multi-site comparative studies, longitudinal designs that track developmental trajectories, and mixed-methods approaches that incorporate standardized measures of both language proficiency and social-emotional competencies(Zhu, 2022).

Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to understanding how SEL principles can enhance primary English education in China. As the country continues to prioritize both English language proficiency and holistic student development, SEL integration offers a promising approach that addresses both objectives simultaneously. By developing students' social-emotional competencies within the context of language instruction, educators can foster not

only linguistic skills but also the emotional intelligence and interpersonal capabilities that are increasingly valued in contemporary society.

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