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An action research about the effects of social-emotional learning in a second language acquisition teacher preparation course

The current action research explored the effects of social-emotional learning (SEL) in an online second language acquisition (SLA) graduate course. Employing the CASEL (2010) framework as the lens, I examined the following research question: What effects does social-emotional learning have on second language teachers in a second language acquisition course? Findings indicated that embedding SEL into the SLA course resulted in participants becoming increasingly self-aware of their learner-selves (i.e., self-awareness), prompting them to deploy a series of strategies to regulate their behaviors and practices as self-taught language learners and teachers (i.e., self-management). Increased empathy and understanding toward their present and future students (i.e., social awareness) was also noted, which contributed to students' building positive, supportive relationships beyond the online classroom (i.e., relationship skills). Finally, SEL prompted participants to reflect on their identities, ideologies, and privileges as language teachers, learners, and speakers, which resulted in making caring and constructive choices (i.e., responsible decision-making).

Key words: social-emotional learning; second language acquisition, action research, language teacher education

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Introduction

In the past three decades, language teacher education (LTE) has expanded its boundaries outside of the physical spaces of academia and has become more interested in exploring how language is used in real-life contexts (Avineri et al., 2019). More specifically, LTE has increasingly recognized the "limitations of purely cognitive approaches" (White, 2018, p. 19) and has been posited to explore the social dimensions of language learning and teaching. As a result, the field is shifting its interest to language-related critical issues in society (Tarone, 2015), local communities (Levine, 2020), and at the personal level (Kramsch, 2005). The shift, sometimes referred to as the emotional turn (White, 2018), has been recently augmented by the COVID-19 pandemic, situating social-emotional concerns as pivotal in LTE and language teaching and learning. In response to this, a large number of publications proposing social-emotional learning (SEL) in second language classrooms have flourished in recent years (e.g., Carr, 2021; Johnson & Saito, 2022; Oxford et al., 2020; Pentón Herrera, 2020; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021). However, fewer studies have focused on the effects of SEL in second language acquisition (SLA) teacher preparation courses and/or programs.

With the purpose of advancing the field of LTE, I engaged in this action research exploring the effects of SEL in an SLA teacher preparation course. To date, a handful of recent publications have explored teachers' preparation in addressing the social-emotional needs of multilingual language learners (e.g., Heineke & Vera, 2021; Melnick & Martinez, 2019; Pentón Herrera, 2024). Furthermore, no studies thus far have explored the effects of SEL on language teachers in an SLA teacher preparation course. With this gap in the literature, I conducted the current study to contribute insights into the intersection of SEL and LTE, shedding light on the impacts and implications of integrating SEL into language teacher preparation programs. Unraveling these effects stands to not only enrich the pedagogical practices of prospective language teachers but also foster the holistic development of language learners they will eventually serve.

The following research question guided this action research: What effects does social-emotional learning have on second language teachers in a second language acquisition course? To answer this question, four types of data were collected in the form of (a) written course assignments, (b) video-recorded weekly online synchronous meetings, (c) an end-of-course questionnaire, and (d) weekly online discussions on Blackboard. Data were analyzed based on the guidelines of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using a mix of deductive and inductive coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021), where the predefined codes followed the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)'s five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.a).

Situating the Present Study and Choosing Action Research

I joined Wildflower University (pseudonym), a U.S.-based institution, in the Spring 2020 semester as an adjunct/part-time professor, and I was assigned to teach the Second Language Acquisition course[1] during that term. I inherited the syllabus from previous faculty members, and taught the course following the same curriculum with very minor modifications. The SLA course was highly theoretical, and students shared in our weekly online synchronous meetings as well as in their end-of-course evaluation that the class was interesting, but they had difficulty understanding how the readings could be applied in their classrooms. My students' comments about the gap between theory and practice were not surprising, considering that this concern has been present in LTE for some years (Ur, 2019; Yin, 2019). Motivated by the opportunity to improve my students' experiences in future semesters, I shared their comments and end-of-course evaluation with the course coordinator and proposed to reconstruct the SLA course. My request was approved.

During the early stages of revamping the SLA course, I knew I wanted to provide my students with ample opportunities to reflect on their own experiences of language learning. The assignments from the previous SLA course focused heavily on reporting about in-class observations (i.e., students were asked to visit a language classroom and report what they saw). Those assignments did not give my students the opportunity to reflect on—or experience first-hand—the theories of SLA using their life experiences as a site for exploration and learning. For me, this was an issue because, as a multilingual language learner and SLA teacher myself, I know that teachers' prior experiences with language inform their pedagogy (Johnson, 1994). Two ruminative inquietudes that continued to come to mind during this process of re-envisioning and reconstructing the SLA course were: How can language teachers be more empathetic toward their students' language learning experiences? and How can I help my students remember the social, emotional, and cognitive processes of learning a new language?

These two inquietudes prompted me to revise the SLA course by embedding SEL as a vital element of the curriculum. In our SLA course, I wanted to purposefully include opportunities where my students could reflect on how their prior language learning experiences affect their teacher beliefs and pedagogy. At the same time, I wanted my students to consider the role of emotions and well-being in language teaching and learning—two elements that remain widely absent in general teacher preparation and LTE programs (Mercer, 2021; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Once I began working on the initial draft of the course, I decided to evaluate its effects and learn how it could be improved in future semesters. Thus, with the vision of evaluating the effects of the course and learning about how to

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1   At the institution where this study was conducted, Second Language Acquisition was a requirement for students seeking SLA graduate degrees such as master's or graduate certificates in Spanish, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Chinese, French, and so forth.

continue improving it for future semesters, an action research project seemed the most appropriate method of inquiry, as it is an approach practitioners commonly use to improve their practices (Burns, 2010).

Analytical Framework

I chose CASEL's SEL framework (2010) as the lens guiding this action research because it provides a well-established and widely recognized set of competencies that are specifically tailored to enhance educational outcomes. The history of CASEL and its framework goes back to the 1960s with the work of James Comer, a Yale graduate who was interested in examining ways to improve academic achievement of low-income youth in New Haven, Connecticut (Comer, 1980). Comer's ideas were concerned with educating the whole child, which meant providing caring and supportive school environments where students and teachers could develop meaningful interactions, leading to overall student performance and school improvement (Comer & Emmons, 2006). Around that time, other scholars were also promoting the need to create frameworks that focused on supporting students' social and emotional skills in schools (Elias et al., 1997). In 1994, a multidisciplinary collaboration of researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates resulted in the creation of CASEL and the term *social and emotional learning* (CASEL, n.d.b). In 1997, the term SEL was defined in the book *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators* (Elias et al., 1997) and, since then, CASEL's work and the practice of SEL have gained momentum in education.

Although different SEL frameworks and definitions currently exist (see Osher et al., 2016; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021), CASEL's framework remains one of the most widely used and well-known. For CASEL, SEL is an integral part of human education and development, and it is defined as the process through which individuals acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2010). CASEL's definition of SEL is guided by its five competencies—also known as the CASEL 5—which include (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making (see Figure 1). According to CASEL, their "framework provides a foundation for communities to use evidence-based SEL strategies in ways that are most meaningful to their local context. It can be applied to many different priorities and aligned with each community's strengths, needs, and cultures" (n.d.c, para. 3).

In the CASEL 5, *self-awareness* is described as individuals' ability to understand their own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviors across contexts. The competence of *self-management* is described as individuals' ability to manage their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions effectively in different

Figure 1. *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's Social-Emotional Learning Wheel*
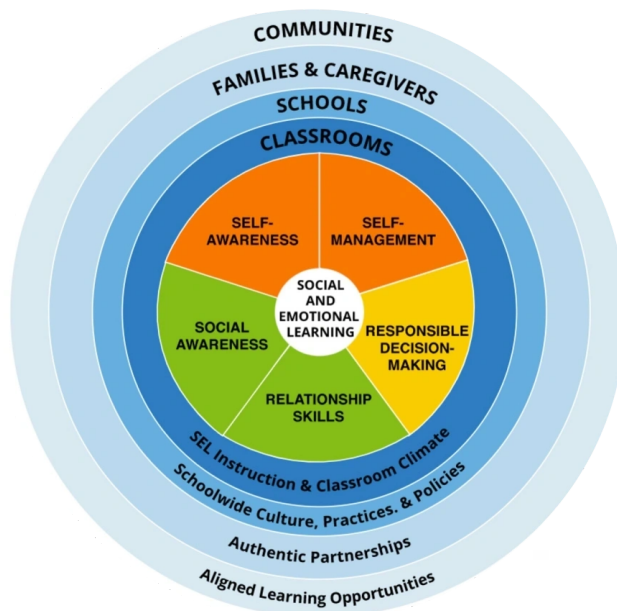
situations. The third competence, *social awareness*, refers to how individuals understand the perspectives of others, empathizing with others and their viewpoints. The fourth competence, *relationship skills*, refers to how individuals establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships, and to navigating diverse settings and contexts. Lastly, *responsible decision-making* refers to individuals' ability to "make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations" (CASEL, 2010, p. 2).

Beyond the core competencies, CASEL's SEL framework is designed within concentric circles that signify the various environments where these competencies are developed and applied. These layers represent the broader contexts in which SEL is nurtured and are pivotal in the effective implementation of SEL strategies. The classroom serves as the immediate setting where students experience SEL, a place where educators can intentionally design lessons that incorporate the five competencies and where students practice these skills daily. Moving beyond the classroom, the entire school environment, encompassing administrative policies to school culture, has a significant role in how SEL is integrated. It is here that a collective responsibility exists to create an environment where SEL principles are not just taught but genuinely lived. Simultaneously, home environments are invaluable, with families and caregivers being instrumental in the development of SEL competencies. Their support and reinforcement amplify the SEL strategies learned in schools, making the learning experience more holistic and

deeply rooted. Furthermore, the broader community, inclusive of after-school programs, community organizations, and local events, serves to extend the learning environment for SEL. As communities resonate with the principles of SEL, students are presented with a consistent and cohesive message, underscoring the importance of social-emotional skills in real-world contexts.

Each layer interacts with the other, creating a cohesive ecosystem that supports the development and application of the SEL competencies. In the context of this study, understanding these layers is crucial, and it proved helpful in guiding me in designing activities and assignments that promoted the knowledge, skills, and attitudes my students need to be socially and emotionally intelligent educators who can support their learners' social-emotional needs. As we delve into the effects of SEL in an SLA teacher preparation course, we must be cognizant of how these layers might influence, reinforce, or challenge the SEL strategies and practices being developed.

Literature Review

Social-Emotional Learning

Since the term social-emotional learning was coined in 1994 and clearly defined in 1997 (Elias et al., 1997), interventions and strategies have evolved. However, its focus has remained on promoting social-emotional skills and attitudes and overall wellness. In the literature, SEL is commonly described as the processes by "which children and adults acquire and apply competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle personal and interpersonal situations constructively" (Osher et al., 2016, p. 645). An important consideration is that "SEL is a process, not a program. This means that its practices and frameworks can be modified to fit into any learning context…SEL has no limitations; practitioners can modify SEL practices to fit their learning realities" (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021, p. vii). The flexibility of SEL has allowed practitioners to embed its principles in a number of forms, such as structured curricula or school-wide interventions, integrating SEL into the fabric of school life (Osher et al., 2016). Furthermore, SEL has become an umbrella term in recent years for different interventions and approaches, such as mindfulness, restorative practices, and peace education, to name a few (see Pentón Herrera, 2020; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021).

Recent studies exploring the effects of SEL in elementary, middle, and high school have reported overall positive effects for students and teachers alike. Boyd (2021) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the influence of trauma-informed mindfulness practices on students' behavior in elementary classrooms. Participants (i.e., elementary school teachers) indicated that trauma-informed mindfulness practices contributed to a quiet and calm classroom atmosphere,

improving student behavior, self-control, and self-regulation over time. Similar to Boyd's (2021) study, Lee and Lee (2021) found that incorporating visual art education and social-emotional learning boosted agency, confidence, participation, communication, and collaborations in elementary students in Kenya. Furthermore, Lee and Lee (2021) also reported that incorporating arts as an SEL tool allowed Indigenous "youth to explore their cultural and ethnic identity, reflect upon social injustice embedded in their lived experience, and express their voices" (p. 11).

At the middle school level, Palma (2021) conducted a qualitative case study to explore teachers' perceptions of SEL. Participants expressed that, in their view, SEL had positive effects on their students, strengthening the bond among students, school, and the community. Espelage et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study to assess the effectiveness of an evidence-based SEL program for reducing bullying, physical aggression, and victimization among middle school students with disabilities. Findings suggest that SEL offers promise in reducing bullying and aggression among students with disabilities (Espelage et al., 2015). Lastly, Valosek et al. (2019) conducted a quasi-experimental design study to evaluate the effects a school meditation program—identified in the study as the Transcendental Meditation Program (TMP)—had on 101 sixth-grade students. The study found that students' social-emotional competencies improved while negative emotional symptoms and distress decreased (Valosek et al., 2019).

At the high school level, Berryhill (2021) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the effects of SEL on adolescent students. Participants (i.e., high school teachers) reported that they experienced an overall increase in their students' social-emotional abilities, including self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social-awareness, and responsible decision-making. In a similar vein, Roberts (2017) conducted a qualitative multiple-case study approach to explore the perceptions of personalization for academic and social-emotional learning, described in the study as social support based on adult-student relationships. Roberts found that SEL contributed to notable positive student characteristics and experiences, such as improvements in behavioral engagement and agency, positive academic self-conceptions, and widespread college-going aspirations. An important underlying takeaway point from Berryhill (2021) and Roberts (2017) is that SEL interventions at the high school level are significantly different from SEL approaches in elementary school. That is, for elementary students, SEL activities are often centered around identifying feelings, understanding cause-and-effect in social situations, and basic problem-solving. However, for adolescent students, SEL practices should focus on students' mindsets and on providing environments that promote meaningful, respectful relationships among students and student--teachers (Yeager, 2017).

Social-Emotional Learning and Language Teacher Education

The above studies and findings are reflective of the increasing number of pu-

blications reporting the beneficial effects SEL has for both students and teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school level (e.g., Boyd, 2021; Osher et al., 2016; Palma, 2021). At the same time, these and other publications also indicate that teachers' preparation and buy-in are vital for the success and effectiveness of SEL initiatives (e.g., Berryhill, 2021; Melnick & Martinez, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, the latest available national report about teacher preparation and social-emotional learning shows that the overwhelming majority of teacher preparation programs do not have courses that educate teachers on how to support the social-emotional needs of students (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Although some school districts do offer some training on SEL (CASEL, 2021), it has been noted that workshops, alone, may not be sufficient to prepare and motivate educators to implement SEL (Martinsone et al., 2020). For this reason, scholars are advocating for states and higher education institutions to consider the adoption of performance assessments that require teachers to demonstrate knowledge and skills in supporting students' social-emotional needs (Melnick & Martinez, 2019).

Emerging publications from around the world are signaling that formal schooling is quickly transforming to embrace SEL as a vital part of its curriculum (e.g., Berg et al., 2021; Dung & Zsolnai, 2021). Nonetheless, these publications also recognize that teachers lack training and do not feel confident—or comfortable—incorporating SEL into their classrooms (Berg et al., 2021; Dresser, 2013; Dung & Zsolnai, 2021; Heineke & Vera, 2021). It is vital for teacher preparation programs to address this current gap in their programs, keeping in mind that the popularity of SEL in schools is expected to continue increasing in the foreseeable future (Oliveira et al., 2021; ReportLinker, 2021).

A small number of studies reported the effects of SEL in courses preparing educators to support emergent multilingual language learners (e.g., Grissom & Kelchner, 2020). Similarly, a handful of studies explored teachers' in-school preparation to support the social-emotional well-being of emergent multilingual language learners (e.g., Heineke & Vera, 2021; Melnick & Martinez, 2019). However, no inquiries thus far explored the effects of SEL in LTE preparation programs or courses. This lack of available scholarship might be due to the fact that social-emotional concerns became a topic of interest only recently. Although SEL remains a fairly new topic in the field of SLA, emerging studies show promise in increasing students' social-emotional competence and overall achievement (see Bai et al., 2024; Soodmand Afshar et al., 2016; Suganda et al., 2018). Furthermore, practitioner-oriented publications proposing SEL interventions in SLA classrooms report the positive experiences of teachers and students alike (e.g., Oxford et al., 2020; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021; Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2021). In the current action research, I sought to contribute to filling the existing gap about the effects of social-emotional learning in SLA teacher preparation courses, and in LTE programs in general.

Method

I used the five-step action research cycle proposed by Mills (2007) as a guide in this action research because it offers a clear, systematic approach that is particularly suited to educational settings. According to Mills, action research inquiry can be divided into five main steps or processes, which are briefly explained below. This section has been divided into four of these steps, which Mills (2007) termed the "dialectic action research spiral" (p. 19). Step five is explained in detail in the Discussion section.

- Step 1: Select topic—During this step, practitioners choose an appropriate topic of interest.
- Step 2: Collect data—Collect data; multiple sources are preferred in action research.
- Step 3: Organize data—Organize all the data collected and prepare it for analysis.
- Step 4: Analyze and interpret data.
- Step 5: Act—Guided by the findings, take steps to improve your practice.

Step 1: Select Topic

The current action research explored the effects of SEL on second language teachers in an SLA course. Thus, the research question guiding the following inquiry was: What effects does social-emotional learning have on second language teachers in a second language acquisition course? An important note of clarification is that participants were informed of this action research during the first week of class, and they had the option of choosing, at any time, to withdraw from the study. The study had been approved previously by the leadership, and I made it very clear to the students that choosing not to participate in the study would not have any consequences or effects on our course or relationship. Choosing not to participate in the study simply meant that, although the student was present in class participating and completed the same assignments, their data were not included as part of the study. The participants included in this manuscript consented to join the study.

Starting the Course

During the first week of class, I shared information about our course and explained to the students that my goal was to immerse them, as much as possible, in the process of second language acquisition. To do this, I asked them to notify me by the end of Week 1 of a language they would like to learn throughout our 15 weeks together. I encouraged the students to choose a language they had never studied before to truly experience the information/theories they would read about firsthand. The goal of learning a new language was not to show proficiency

at the end of the course but to use those language learning experiences as data to complete the course assignments. Students were encouraged to allocate a minimum of three hours every week to study the language of their choice outside of class using any materials or approaches they deemed appropriate.

Participants

There was a total of 11 language teachers recruited in the current study, eight females and three males (see Table 1). All participants were language teachers (a mix of pre- and in-service teachers) and taught or were planning to teach either English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), Spanish, French, and/or Chinese as a second language in K-12 and higher education. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) because of their shared status as students in the same SLA course and second language teachers. The participants agreed to participate in the project voluntarily, knowing that data would be collected through their written assignments and interactions in class.

Step 2: Collect Data

The current action research was conducted during the Spring 2020 term for a total of 15 weeks. The course was taught through a synchronous online format, which means that we met via Blackboard Collaborate once a week for 90 minutes to talk about the weekly topic, and we spent the other six days of the week reading the assigned readings and interacting asynchronously in the Blackboard discussion forum. Data were collected throughout the 15 weeks, and four types of data were collected: (a) written course assignments, (b) video-recorded weekly online synchronous meetings, (c) an end-of-course questionnaire, and (d) weekly online discussions on Blackboard. All data collected were primarily in English, but there was also Japanese and Chinese included by the participants. Figure 2 shows a diagram of data collection, and more details are provided below.

Written Course Assignment

There was a total of four assignments. In the first assignment (due on Week 3), *Language Learning Autobiography*, students were asked to reflect on their own language learning experiences. The purpose of this assignment was for students to use their own experiences learning the language selected during Week 1 as a foundation for their understanding of the SLA process. The second assignment, *Self-as-Learner Analysis* (due on Week 8), asked students to experience a new language by watching at least a 30-minute segment of a television show or movie in the language they chose during Week 1. Students had to complete a reflection on their processing, both affective (what they were feeling) and cognitive (what they were thinking). In the third assignment, *Language Learner Reflective Memo*
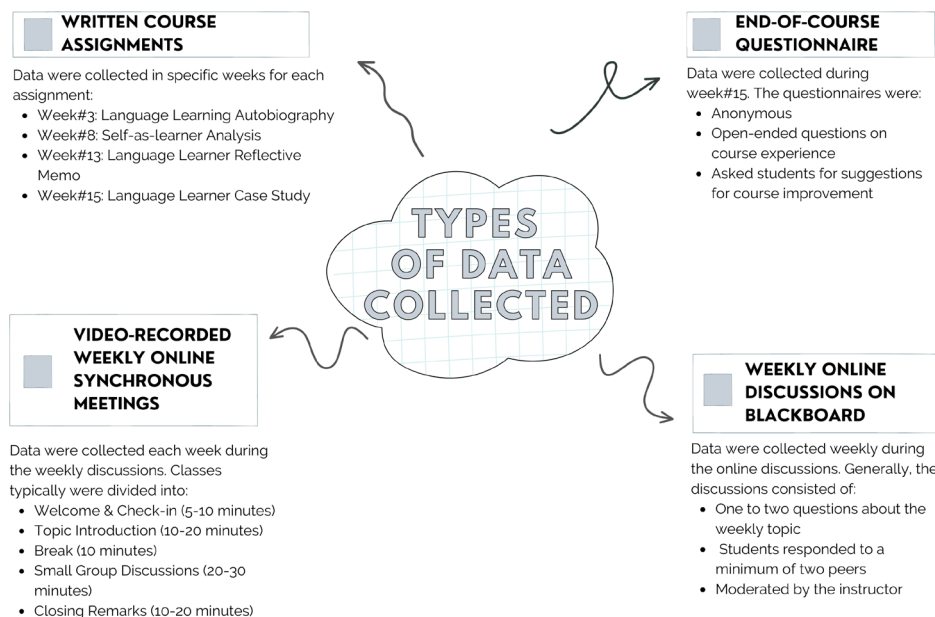
Table 1. *List of Participants (All Names Are Pseudonyms)*

Name	Gender	Race	Teaching status	Language(s) taught	Languages spoken	Language chosen to learn	Course of study
Don	M	White	Pre-service	ESOL	English (L1); Chinese (L2)	Spanish	Graduate TESOL Certificate
Marta	F	Hispanic	Pre-service	French and Spanish	Spanish & English (L1); French (L3)	German	Master's in International Education
Lin	F	Asian	Pre-service	Chinese	Vietnamese (L1); English (L2); Chinese (L3)	Korean	Master's in International Education
John	M	White	Pre-service	Chinese	English (L1); Chinese (L2)	Japanese	Master's in International Education
May	F	White	Pre-service	ESOL	English (L1)	Japanese	Master's in International Education with Graduate TESOL Certificate
Flores	F	Asian	In-service (K-12)	ESOL and Chinese	Chinese (L1); English (L2)	Japanese	Master's in International Education with Graduate TESOL Certificate
Si	F	Asian	In-service (higher education)	ESOL and Chinese	Chinese (L1); English (L2)	English*	Master's in International Education with Graduate TESOL Certificate
Mei	F	Asian	In-service (K-12)	ESOL and Chinese	Chinese (L1); English (L2)	French	Master's in International Education with Graduate TESOL Certificate
Shu	F	Asian	Pre-service	Chinese	Chinese (L1); English (L2)	English*	Master's in International Education
Han	M	Asian	Pre-service	ESOL	Chinese (L1); English (L2)	English*	Master's in International Education with Graduate TESOL Certificate
Linda	F	White	In-service (K-12)	ESOL	English (L1); Spanish (L2)	French	Master's in Curriculum and Instruction with Graduate TESOL Certificate

Note. M = male. F = female, L1 = first language, L2 = second language, L3 = third language. *Si, Shu, and Han decided to choose English as the language to learn during our course because they stated they were still learning English and they did not feel comfortable with their English level yet.

(due on Week 13), students were asked to reflect on their experiences as language learners and connect their observations to SLA theories and research we had read about throughout our course. Lastly, the fourth and final assignment, Language *Learner Case Study* (due on Week 15), required students to collect information about themselves as language learners over the 15 weeks of the semester and analyze their overall progress. The *Language Learner Case Study* included a section on learner profile (i.e., detailed information about the student and formal schooling experiences), language samples (i.e., oral and written) of their learning throughout our course, and instructional recommendations on how to improve their language learning experiences in the future closely guided by SLA theories and research.

Figure 2. *Data Collection Procedures and Information*

WRITTEN COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Data were collected in specific weeks for each assignment:
- Week#3: Language Learning Autobiography
- Week#8: Self-as-learner Analysis
- Week#13: Language Learner Reflective Memo
- Week#15: Language Learner Case Study

END-OF-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Data were collected during week#15. The questionnaires were:
- Anonymous
- Open-ended questions on course experience
- Asked students for suggestions for course improvement

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTED

VIDEO-RECORDED WEEKLY ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS MEETINGS

Data were collected each week during the weekly discussions. Classes typically were divided into:
- Welcome & Check-in (5-10 minutes)
- Topic Introduction (10-20 minutes)
- Break (10 minutes)
- Small Group Discussions (20-30 minutes)
- Closing Remarks (10-20 minutes)

WEEKLY ONLINE DISCUSSIONS ON BLACKBOARD

Data were collected weekly during the online discussions. Generally, the discussions consisted of:
- One to two questions about the weekly topic
- Students responded to a minimum of two peers
- Moderated by the instructor

Video-Recorded Weekly Online Synchronous Meetings

We met synchronously once a week for 90 minutes via Blackboard Collaborate. All the synchronous meetings were video recorded with the students' permission. In our synchronous meetings, we primarily talked about the weekly topics and assigned readings, and addressed any inquietudes about the information we were learning that week. The 90 minutes were primarily divided into: (a) Welcoming everyone, doing a quick check-in and opening the floor for any course-related or unrelated conversation (5-10 minutes), (b) briefly introducing the topic of the week and presenting major points (10-20 minutes), (c) a 10-minute break, (d) dividing the class into small groups for deep discussions about the topic of the week (20-30 minutes), and (e) concluding with final thoughts, questions, and closing remarks (10-20 minutes).

End-of-Course Questionnaire

At the end of the course, during Week 15, I asked the students to complete a questionnaire about their experiences in our SLA course. The questionnaire was anonymous (i.e., students were not required to disclose their names) and included open-ended questions asking students to share their thoughts on what worked and did not work in our course and why. I also asked students to share any suggestions they might have to improve the course.

Weekly Online Discussions on Blackboard

Students were required to complete a written weekly online discussion on Blackboard about the topic of the week. On average, students were asked one to two questions about the weekly topic and were also asked to respond in writing to a minimum of two peers' responses. I served as moderator for all the discussions in our course.

Step 3: Organize Data

Organizing data by type and source is recommended in deductive and inductive methods prior to analysis (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). As such, all collected data were saved in a computer folder and added to a Microsoft Excel document. Tabs were assigned in the Microsoft Excel document, each with a title pertaining to the type of data collected (e.g., responses to end-of-course questionnaire) to facilitate the analysis process. Once the data were organized, I printed it all out to facilitate analysis and interpretation.

Step 4: Analyze and Interpret Data

Data were analyzed based on the guidelines of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using a mix of deductive and inductive coding. Although action research studies typically use inductive coding (Burns, 2010), I decided to employ a mix of deductive and inductive coding because CASEL's framework provides a template and structure through which I could evaluate the effects of SEL. In qualitative research, deductive methods are important to test specific variables, and also align the study's framework, research goals, and findings. At the same time, inductive coding allows researchers to broaden their worldview and learn subtleties about the topic being explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). In this particular study, using a mix of deductive and inductive coding allowed me to test the effects of CASEL's SEL framework in the SLA course and whether or not I had weaved CASEL's five competencies effectively in the course while keeping a broad perspective and an open mind, and remembering the need to slow down to notice subtleties in the data (Saldaña, 2011).

Guided by CASEL's SEL framework, this inquiry began with five preset deductive codes: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. During the analysis process, each preset code was assigned a highlight color (e.g., self-management was assigned a green highlight). Following deductive reasoning, data were read and listened to (in the case of recorded classes) in its entirety multiple times to find excerpts that fit the preset codes. During this process, excerpts fitting within specific codes were highlighted and all the data, once highlighted, were re-read and listened to again multiple times during data analysis to confirm accuracy. Once data were deducti-

vely analyzed, I then revisited the data inductively and identified additional sub-
-codes based on emergent patterns, leading to findings.

Detailed Analytical Methods and Units of Analysis

In line with the thematic analysis guidelines, I commenced the analytical phase by transcribing data that was most pertinent to the research objectives. Specifically, from the collected data, transcripts were made of: (a) select segments from the video-recorded weekly online synchronous meetings where discussions revolved around the effects of SEL on SLA teaching experiences, (b) certain reflective parts from the written course assignments that provided insights into the individual language learning journeys of the students, (c) relevant responses from the end-of-course questionnaire that were directly linked to the SEL influences on the course, and (d) specific discussions from the weekly online Blackboard interactions that touched on the interplay between SEL and SLA. It should be noted that not all the data were transcribed verbatim, but those that held significant relevance to the research question were chosen for this study.

The units of analysis for the data were twofold: deductive units, which were anchored around CASEL's SEL framework, and inductive units, which emerged organically from the data. The deductive codes, which were predetermined based on CASEL's competencies, acted as the guiding lens during the initial stages of data analysis. These codes enabled a structured approach to sieve through the extensive data. However, to ensure that no nuances were overlooked, an inductive approach was subsequently employed. This ensured that themes and patterns that were not necessarily anticipated but were crucial to understanding the research question were captured. By employing this combined analytical method, the study maintained a balance between adhering to an established framework (deductive) and allowing new insights to emerge from the data (inductive), ensuring both rigor and richness in the analysis.

Results

In this section, I present the most salient findings found in the data divided into the five preset deductive codes (as explained above): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Self-Awareness

Language and Learning

Data revealed that embedding SEL into the SLA course allowed participants to become more self-aware of their own language learning experiences. Participants confessed that they "had not given much thought" (Han, Assignment 1)

to how their formal schooling and language learning experiences influence them and their worldview as teachers. In addition, participants disclosed that having the opportunity to engage in self-reflective assignments "helped me learn a significant amount about my own language processing strengths and weaknesses, and I feel more comfortable teaching students second language acquisition knowing that information about myself" (Anonymous, End-of-course questionnaire). Furthermore, May, the only participant in our course who self-identified as monolingual, candidly shared in one of our weekly online synchronous meetings that

> I had not really thought about how my students would feel when they are learning English. I mean, in other classes [in the teacher preparation program] we are taught about how to teach but, to be honest, I have not been as emotionally involved as I am in this class. (May, weekly online synchronous meetings for Week 5)

In this excerpt, May was commenting on a prompt I had given the class about how learning a new language during the course has affected the way they approach the weekly readings. In particular, during this part of the class (around Week 5), we had been discussing the role of emotions in learning a second language. May continued,

> the last time I learned a new language was in high school, but I can't remember any French; well, maybe merci (i.e., thank you) [laughs] but that's it! I don't really recall how emotions may have affected my motivation or interest in learning French [in high school], or maybe other factors, I don't know. I am beginning to understand how difficult it is to learn a new language and how important emotions are in this process [of language learning]. (May, weekly online synchronous meetings for Week 5)

In this excerpt, May was referring to one of the weekly readings (i.e., Brown, 2014, Chapter 3), which discusses the topic of affective considerations for language learners. As a monolingual educator who is teaching ESOL to multilingual language learners, SEL allowed May to be more empathetic about the process of language learning, resulting in increased awareness about the emotional labor involved in learning a new language.

Another example of how SEL contributed to improving the participants' self-awareness comes from Linda, who shared, "I never thought about the fact that I use a lot of visuals in my classes because, as I am learning in this course, I am a visual learner. I guess we do teach the way we learn" (Linda, weekly online synchronous meetings for Week 10). Linda, prompted by my question "Would anyone like to share any realizations about our weekly readings before we begin our class?" shared this "ah-ha moment" at the beginning of Week 10's class. She continued by stating that now that she understands this fact about herself, she

is more aware of the need to improve her teaching by including other teaching strategies. She ended her comment by chucklingly stating, "Who knows, maybe I'll even include an activity about songs for my aural learners one of these days."

Linda's cheery exchange during Week 10's class is reflective of her classmates' experiences and feelings. Data revealed that, through SEL, participants became more self-aware of their learner-self, which prompted them to engage in deep reflections about their teacher-self and their teaching practices.

Self-Management

Learning to Learn (and Teach)

Throughout the weekly discussions and course assignments, it became clear that as participants began to understand themselves better as language learners, they began to deploy a multitude of strategies to manage their unwanted emotions and regulate their behaviors with the vision of improving their language learning experience. At the same time, in our weekly discussions, participants began to realize that beyond learning a new language, they were also experiencing first-hand the content they were reading about in the assigned weekly readings, such as the different factors affecting L2 teaching and learning. These first-hand experiences resulted in participants becoming more personally involved in their learning process, which resulted in positive and unwanted emotions. To deal with these emotions, participants began to deploy strategies, either consciously or unconsciously, that led to behavioral regulation.

An example of how participants' experiences influenced the regulation of their behavior both as a learner and teacher comes from Flores, who was learning Japanese during the course. During the final project, Flores evaluated her language learning experiences, stating that writing in Japanese was somewhat easy because of her L1 (Chinese). At the same time, she recognized that there were areas for improvement. According to Flores,

The positive feedback I got from my Japanese friends was that my Japanese handwriting was not bad at all, if I spent enough time and energy on it, it could look really nice and neat. I would give partial credit to my L1, since Chinese characters are also living in a framed box, different from the fluidity in Western handwriting. My weakness is also very obvious, when I see a full sentence [in Japanese], due to lack of knowing the tone, or meaning of some words, I had trouble pausing in between. At the start, I would look for a "hint character" "は", I identified the character as "is" in English, and I would pause after it. This "は" character was also slightly tricky, since it is pounced as "ha" as an individual unit, and "wa" in a sentence, so when I was listening to a sentence and trying to write it down, I was very lost. (Flores, Language Learner Case Study assignment)

In this excerpt, Flores demonstrated that she was increasingly aware of her areas of strength and improvement, and of the interconnected nature of languages in language learning. In her case, being a native Chinese speaker helped her write in Japanese. At the same time, creating meaning from Japanese to Chinese and English seemed to be challenging for Flores. During this self-evaluation process, Flores demonstrated that she was capable of reflecting on her own thoughts and experiences, a concept known as metacognition (Haukås, 2018). The rest of her analysis in the Language Learner Case Study assignment reflects that, by engaging in metacognition, she was able to regulate her behaviors to take control of her learning.

To improve in my Japanese reading and writing, I knew I had to train my thoughts. I had to stop thinking in Chinese or English and think in Japanese. I had to learn like a child! To learn like a child, I changed my desktop background to multiple Japanese charts that kids use. All the charts were designed for kids, so it was really cute! I could spend time on it and not get bored. It was also great that I could constantly check on the characters and refer it to a word, so again, for better memorization. This is a strategy I will teach my students so they can think in the L2. (Flores, Language Learner Case Study assignment)

In this excerpt, Flores commented on a strategy she used to overcome her challenges with reading and writing in Japanese. Research shows that the ability to regulate one's behavior is conducive to effective language learning (Teng, 2020), and for L2 teachers like Flores, reflecting on this knowledge also had direct implications on her teaching practices. As she stated in her assignment, "This is a strategy I will teach my students so they can think in the L2," signaling how SEL positively affected her behavior both as a learner and a teacher.

Social Awareness

Positive Views and Emotions

"Something I learned is to be more empathetic to my students' emotions. In China, I used to tell my English learners to just get over their anxiety or fear of speaking, but now I understand [it] is not that easy" (Mei, weekly online synchronous meetings for Week 9). Mei candidly confessed in our online conversation for Week 9 that she felt regret because, before our course, affective issues/difficulties in language learning were not a topic of immediate concern for her. However, our conversations and readings, in particular Norton and Toohey's (2001) article (one of the assigned readings), seemed to shift her viewpoints, prompting her to reevaluate the role of affective concerns and how her students felt/feel when they are learning a new language.

Throughout our weekly discussions, it was apparent that participants were becoming increasingly aware of the affective issues connected to the process of learning a new language. Being tasked with learning a new language during our

course while reading about the process of L2 acquisition made a difference in the participants' viewpoints, as aptly stated by Don during our weekly online synchronous meetings for Week 14, "having to learn a new language and the activities in this course have prompted us to put ourselves in our students' shoes."

In addition to becoming more empathetic about the emotional rollercoaster that is language learning, participants began to consider emotions as an important part of their pedagogy, centering students' affective concerns at the heart of their teaching. This is best described by Marta, who, in Assignment 3, was asked to make a connection between her language learning experiences in our course and her future teaching practices. Marta shared,

> My experience with not being enthused about learning German, while at the same time being excited about making progress then in turn being motivated to learn with a new program has caused me to consider that not everyone studies a language because they want to or for the same reasons…The upshot for me as it applies to my future teaching is twofold: Among certain learners, like immigrants and refugees that I might teach, I should focus on skills that are immediately useful and survival expressions. Also, I must try to make my students build up that excitement momentum too. (Marta, Assignment 3)

In addition to Marta's candid reflection, participants confided in the end-of--course questionnaire that experiencing difficult emotions in language learning, such as anxiety and stress, allowed them to remember those feelings when they were previously learning a new language earlier in life, resulting in increased empathy toward their language learners.

> I thought the exercise of learning a new language was useful…Having to learn a new language caused me to remember all the anxiety, stress, and difficulty, which inspired empathy in me. It reminded me to think about the anxiety my students feel as well. (Anonymous, End-of-course questionnaire)

> What I liked the most about the assignments was learning a new language. I think I took my L1 & L2 for granted, [and] almost forgot how it was to learn a new language, or to learn a new skill. It is more rewarding than I thought. I have a newfound respect for children and adults who learn a new language. (Anonymous, End-of-course questionnaire)

Engaging participants in activities that gave them the opportunity to experience first-hand the process of L2 acquisition increased their capacity for comprehending what their students feel when learning a new language (i.e., heightened social awareness). At the same time, data revealed that increased social awareness seems to result in an increased sense of respect, positive feelings, and asset-based views toward language learners.

Relationship Skills

Building Relationships Beyond the Online Classroom

Establishing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships in online learning is vital for fruitful engagement. As such, I purposefully included SEL activities where participants could interact with one another and develop respectful relationships throughout our course. During the check-in activities, for example, participants often shared with the class how their weeks were progressing and any inquietude or challenges they were confronting at the time. In other instances, participants used the check-in activities as an opportunity to network with the vision of connecting with classmates outside the online learning space. This brief exchange took place during the check-in activity for Week 3's synchronous meeting:

> Shu: I want to ask. Who live[s] around the school and want[s] to meet to practice English speaking? I shared before… I am a new international student and [it] is difficult to make American friends… and I want to practice English.
> Si: [interjected] Yes! Me too!
> John: Hey, Shu and Si, I'll be glad to meet at the university's Starbucks to practice English speaking sometime and to talk about our weekly readings.
> Linda: …Count me in too!

In this brief exchange, Shu and Si voiced their interest in connecting with their classmates outside the confines of online learning. Shu and Si were new international students from China, and they were interested in improving their English and "make American friends" (in Shu's words). The conversation among Shu, Si, John, Linda, and other classmates lasted for a while during the check-in activity, and I just sat back and let them have this moment to socialize. After 15 minutes, I invited everyone to continue this conversation offline and to email each other to meet in person. While reading Shu's Assignment 4, I realized that our course had become a planter for cultivating relationships beyond the confines of online learning. Shu shared,

> In week 3 I had the initiative to ask classmates to meet with me. I started meeting with John, Linda, Si, and May sometimes at the Starbucks and sometimes in the library. We talked about the assigned readings for class and information. In our meetings, I not only gradually started to speak English proactively and the fluency and duration of speaking increased and prolonged, but at the same time I made some good friends who have the same needs and goals as me. (Shu, assignment #4)

Si also reflected, albeit briefly, on these meetings. "I will recommend to my students to keep [sic] practicing. I liked connecting with Shu and other friends in person because we practiced English with native speakers" (Si, Assignment 4).

Responsible Decision-Making

Personal Biases

During the course, it became increasingly clear, especially in the weekly online synchronous conversations and written assignments, that giving participants the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences with language learning resulted in many memories and recollections that, at times, created tensions. I asked participants to think of tensions as opportunities to grow both personally and professionally. In addition, I asked participants to treat these tensions as recorded data in the assignments or discussions to analyze their personal feelings and attitudes toward language learning. In the final assignment, Marta, who chose to learn German during the course, reported on these tensions.

> I tried to use different learning strategies, such as varying the times I practice speaking and writing on the app…, apart from that, I did not make a lot of effort to communicate with native German speakers or otherwise try to learn more about German culture, apart from watching the German news one day…All of this is while knowing that German is a prestige [sic] language. Yet it is not English, the most prestigious language in the world. Deep down I knew that I could get by in Germany with English if I did not acquire enough German. I recognize that by thinking this way, I am in a way suggesting a superiority of English, since it is a world language, that is a perception that Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie (2017) refer to at length in their description of the teaching and learning of languages other than English (LOTE). This concept is surely one that all native English speakers must face and I am choosing to face it now, it's my responsibility. (Marta, Assignment 4)

Marta's sincere reflection about how she sees and understands her privilege as a native speaker of English ("the most prestigious language in the world," in her words) is both refreshing and important to acknowledge. Although Marta is a language teacher of Spanish and French, she felt deep down that English was the language that "could get [her] by in Germany" if she "did not acquire enough German," pointing to native English speaker privilege ideologies found in the literature (e.g., Ruecker & Ives, 2014) and demonstrating that these ideologies do not dwell only in monolingual speakers (i.e., Marta speaks three languages).

In contrast to Marta and other native English-speaking participants' reflections, which connected with ongoing discussions about ideologies and the global power of English, non-native English-speaking participants' assignments focused

on challenging views of proficiency (whether in English or in the language studied in class) as one of the important takeaways. For example, Lin shared that when learning English during K-12 in Vietnam, "I was shy and embarrassed to speak because my accent was not good. Now I see that everyone has different accents and I will tell this to my students so they feel good" (Lin, Assignment 4). Similarly, Han reflecting on an oral presentation he delivered while learning English in China, confessed that "if I were able to return to my 17 years old [self], I would tell myself that maybe…my accent was not good, but accent is not everything. I am reminding myself every day to be kind to me[sic]" (Han, Assignment 4).

Discussion and Conclusions

In the context of the research question of What effects does social-emotional learning have on second language teachers in a second language acquisition course, the findings indicated that embedding SEL into the SLA course resulted in personal and professional transformations for participants. More specifically, SEL activities and assignments that asked students to reflect upon their experiences as language learners resulted in them becoming increasingly self-aware of their learner selves (i.e., self-awareness). This, in turn, exhorted them to re-evaluate their approaches to and preferences in teaching—a practice associated with improved teacher performance and constructive behavior (Andrews, 2001; Farrell, 2013). Further, with increased self-awareness about their learner and teacher selves, participants began to deploy a series of strategies meant to regulate their behaviors and practices both as self-taught language learners and teachers (i.e., self-management), which has proven to yield positive results for L2 learning (Teng, 2020) and teaching (Dewaele et al., 2022).

Findings also revealed that SEL interventions resulted in increased empathy and understanding toward their present and future students (i.e., social awareness) as well as an increased sense of respect, positive feelings, and asset-based views toward language learners. Ongoing discussions and debates in LTE and SLA have placed the cultivation of positive relationships and feelings and asset-based approaches at the heart of L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Casanova & Alvarez, 2023; MacIntyre et al., 2019). However, researchers agree that LTE programs fail to adequately prepare L2 teachers with these skills (Mercer, 2021; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2022; Smith, 2008). Data from this study indicated that SEL interventions show much potential in preparing pre- and in-service L2 teachers to reflect on their practices, put themselves in their students' shoes, and transform deficit-based views into asset-based perspectives.

Another point emanating from the data speaks directly to the influence SEL interventions had on students' building positive, supportive relationships beyond the online classroom (i.e., relationship skills). Keeping in mind the growing pressure to embrace collaborative and community-based practices in L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Altstaedter et al., 2016; Hernández, 2017), LTE programs are

expected to support language teachers in becoming socioliterate professionals (Hedgcock, 2002). Similar to Lee and Lee's (2021) findings, the current showed that SEL practices yielded positive results in regard to participants developing relationship skills, especially for international participants, who established relationships with classmates where they could practice English, talk about the courses' content and readings, and transcend the isolation and confines traditionally associated with online learning. I exhort the academic community to build on these findings and continue exploring the effects of SEL in building relationships within (language) teacher preparation programs situated in online learning environments.

Lastly, data revealed that, during our course, SEL allowed participants to reflect on their identities, ideologies, and privileges as language learners and speakers. This, in turn, resulted in making caring and constructive choices that challenged their past experiences, personal ideologies, and behaviors with the vision of becoming more caring and kinder individuals (as shown by Han's excerpt) and teachers (as shown by Marta's and Lin's excerpts)—that is, responsible decision-making. The emotional turn in SLA (White, 2018) has brought increased attention to the fact that LTE programs have embedded monolingual biases that assign privilege to English and native-speaker ideologies (Barros et al., 2021; Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Ortega, 2014). The reproduction of these ideologies and privileges in language teaching and learning is clearly seen throughout the data of this study. Through SEL, native English-speaking participants became aware of and challenged their privileges as native speakers and biases toward LOTE. Additionally, non-native English-speaking participants from China and Vietnam replicated school-taught behaviors of native-speakerism ideologies by (self) policing and prioritizing proficiency in the language they were studying. Further studies should explore in more depth the relationship and potential of SEL in unearthing and addressing issues of social responsibility and responsible decision-making in LTE.

Step 5: Act

The last step in Mill's (2007) action research cycle is to act after analyzing and interpreting the data. Thus, during this final step, I began to explore the possible ways of moving forward to continue improving the SLA course and program. Two important realizations I kept in mind during this final step were that, first, as revealed by the data, through SEL, I can help bridge the ongoing and concerning gap in LTE of *knowledge about* and *knowledge how* (see Richards, 2008) because teachers get to experience transforming first-hand the content knowledge (i.e., knowledge about) into accessible, practical, and relatable knowledge (i.e., knowledge how) they can use in language teaching (i.e., bridging theoretical and practical knowledge). Second, the current study also supports Johnson's (1994) findings that teachers' experiences with language learning inform their pedagogy, which is an important consideration for LTE programs and should be taken into

consideration when preparing LTE courses. That is, language teachers should not only read about language teaching and learning, but should have the opportunity to experience it first-hand through the LTE programs (i.e., personal experiences with language learning).

Although the outcomes found in this study reflect that SEL yielded benefits and positive experiences for learners, I understand these findings only represent the incorporation of SEL in one online course. As such, I am considering the next step of the process to be the sharing of these findings with the leadership and, upon their approval, embedding SEL into the entire SLA program in an effort to evaluate its effect using a larger set of data. In addition, I will recommend the leadership considers including open-ended questions in the end-of-course questionnaires where students can reflect upon their experiences and disclose specific examples or points that made the course particularly relevant (or not) to them, which might disclose important information about the benefits of SEL in the SLA program. These steps, I recognize, are only the beginning, and much research and ongoing evaluations about the effects of SEL in the SLA teacher preparation program are needed. However, this initial study gives me hope that SEL can be one of the solutions to the many challenges affecting LTE programs today.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The Author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

Funding

The Author reports no sources of funding for the current study.

Research Ethics Statement

The leadership of the TESOL Certificate Program at George Washington University approved this study. The ethical guidelines while designing, conducting, and reporting on the study that I followed was to collect data only from participants who agreed to be part of this study and to maintain the information of participants and the institution in anonymity. The leadership of the TESOL Certificate Program at George Washington University reviewed my proposal and the study. The consent form was obtained from the participants via email. I shared information with the participants about the study, and asked them to return to me the signed consent forms if they agreed to be part of the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data will be shared upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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