The *NISSEM Global Briefs* series aims to show how SDG Target 4.7 themes and social and emotional learning (SEL) can be embedded in education policies, programs, curricula, materials, and practice, to help make progress towards sustainable development. Since the publication of the first volume in 2019, it has become well-established as a regular overview of an important dimension of education worldwide.

This fourth volume of *NISSEM Global Briefs* is the first to address subject specialization. It explores the challenges and opportunities facing curriculum specialists, teachers, and writers of textbooks and learning materials for teaching national and international languages.

The volume focuses mainly on mother tongue (L1) and on English as an additional language (L2). The decision to include L1 and L2 education in a single volume reflects the many concepts and challenges that are common to teaching each discipline in a rapidly changing world. It also recognizes that in some contexts several languages have varying degrees of use – for example, where L1 may support the teaching of L2.

With 16 papers by a total of 37 contributors from a wide range of countries, and an introductory conversation by co-editors, Andy Smart, Susan Iannuzzi, Lisa Horvath, and Margaret Sinclair, this is an innovative addition to the *Global Briefs* series.

'For textbook authors, publishers, and SEL developers, NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the Social, the Emotional and the Sustainable is a must read.'
SOLFRID RAKNES, *Journal of Education in Emergencies*

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NISSEM GLOBAL BRIEFS

Educating for the Social,
the Emotional and the Sustainable

Volume 4
Doing more with language teaching

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the Emotional and the Sustainable

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Introduction

A conversation between the co-editors of the volume, Andy Smart, Susan Iannuzzi, Lisa Horvath, and Margaret Sinclair

The *Global Briefs* series began in 2019 with a large volume showing how social and emotional learning (SEL) can help give children agency to address personal, societal and global challenges and opportunities. The idea behind the series is to show glimpses of work from different parts of the world, particularly the global South. We have always described the papers as semi-academic: they have the shape of academic papers, and some are research-based while others are reflections. The audience we've always aimed at is, in fact, those working in a non-academic context, especially in curriculum departments, or writing textbooks and learning materials, or engaged in related work.

NISSEM has three pillars. The first 'S' of NISSEM's name stands for *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.7*. This Target proclaims that a key purpose of education must be to introduce a set of sustainability and citizenship themes and values, including respect for diversity and gender equality. The second 'S' is *social and emotional learning (SEL)*. The letters 'EM' stand for *educational materials*, while the initial 'N' and 'I' stand for 'networking to integrate'.

The title of this new volume, *Doing More with Language Teaching*, reflects that in addition to grammar and language skills, the content and pedagogy of language education can address the goals of SDG Target 4.7 and SEL, as two sides of a coin. Language teaching is about communication and other interpersonal skills that are critical to student well-being and which can support student agency in addressing local and global challenges. We aim to promote a wider discussion around embedding themes and values from SDG 4.7 and SEL, and SEL-based pedagogy, into textbooks and other education materials, through providing better support to writers of subject syllabi, textbooks, and other education materials.

In the following conversation, *Global Briefs* editors Andy Smart and Margaret Sinclair were joined by co-editors Susan Iannuzzi and Lisa Horvath to discuss the themes that emerged from the 16 papers.[1] The co-editors conclude with some implications that they identified through working on the volume.

The focus on curriculum subjects

MARGARET: Much of NISSEM's work centers on how SEL and the themes and values of target 4.7 are embedded in subjects taught in schools, in the national curriculum. It is therefore mostly about prescribed or approved course books rather than other educational materials, partly because in many settings in the global South, teachers and students don't have access to other educational materials and partly because national textbooks often set the parameters of the curriculum for most classrooms. We believe that unless textbook writers are enabled to address SEL and target 4.7 goals, national policy commitments in this area will not be reflected at classroom level or reach and motivate students.

NISSEM's approach tends to focus on infusing SEL and the themes and values of Target 4.7 into curriculum subjects themselves, even though some of the papers in previous volumes of Global Briefs describe 'stand-alone' programs. We favor combining stand-alone programs with embedding SEL and Target 4.7 content in core subject areas. Stand-alone courses in many countries may not be implemented or sustainable, even if they appear in the school timetable, particularly where high-stakes examinations put pressure on classroom time. There are exceptions of course. For example, the Happiness Curriculum in Delhi, which is taught to elementary school children at the beginning of each day, has political support and substantial

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[1] The editors would like to thank Carol Benson, specialist in multilingual education based on non-dominant languages, for her comments on the draft of this Introduction.

implementation.[2] We see that as very positive, but it is a little exceptional. So, we decided to dedicate this new volume of Global Briefs to a curriculum area or discipline, the teaching of languages, in order to explore the possibilities for more consciously addressing Target 4.7 and SEL in this area. In fact, the volume is about two sub-disciplines, or areas of discourse, each with their own community of practice and research: the teaching of mother tongue and national languages, and the teaching of additional languages. There are many settings where there is no clear-cut distinction between these at classroom level, as some of the papers show, but in order to reach out to these two communities of practice, the volume is divided into two parts.

The focus on teaching mother tongues (L1) and national languages as well as second or additional languages (L2)

ANDY: Let's talk about the links between these two areas and why we decided to include them both. It's a new departure for the Global Briefs series to focus on subject areas, but it's also unusual more widely to have these two disciplines under one roof. And perhaps that's partly because the boundaries for these two disciplines are not always clear: for example, many children who we might think of as L1 learners are actually being educated and learning to read in a language that they don't speak or understand.[3]

SUSAN: I think back to when I first got involved with language teaching, through the English as a Second Language route, as a Kindergarten [KG1] teacher in Cairo. I wasn't really familiar with the controversies of using L1 in the L2 classroom, especially the L2 English classroom, and it wasn't an issue for me at the time

2 https://dreamadream.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Happiness-Curriculum-Theory-Practice-and-Way-Forward-1.pdf
3 'An estimated 40 percent, or 2.3 billion, of the world's people still lack access to instruction in a language they speak or understand (Walter & Benson, 2012). According to the World Bank (2005), 50 percent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of the school is different than the language of the home.' https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245575

because I had no Arabic skills back then. The practice of the time, at this school and others as well as the policy in the Egyptian Ministry of Education, was 'English only' in the classroom and textbooks. Everything was very separate. In the time that I've also been doing L1 work, around 10 years now, there's been a massive move towards including all learners' languages, with mother tongue supporting second language learning as needed. Using L1 in L2 classrooms also supports L1 development, both for oral and written skills, as well as confident identity development and transfer of skills between all languages of the learner. Some of the papers in this volume talk about 'translanguaging' and about conscious choices on the part of learners, and what it does to their affective filters, about what they feel comfortable with. Are they ready to learn? Are they receptive to learning? Do they feel positive about being in the classroom? The role of all languages in the language learning classroom is becoming more widely respected in foreign language learning classrooms, even though it's always been respected in the literature on bilingual and multilingual education. The lines between first and second language are blurring a lot more in the minds of practitioners in many diverse language contexts. Priscilla Cruz's paper from the Philippines talks about this.

LISA: It was the same when I began teaching English in Hungary 15 years ago. I felt guilty every time I switched into my students' L1 [Hungarian] to support language learning. This move away from L2 only and a growing appreciation for the L1 is reassuring. Translanguaging in the language classroom plays an important role in engaging with a new language and in supporting social identities, by showing that multilingualism is a resource not a deficit.

SUSAN: I think this shows how far language teaching has come in the past few decades. The problem that a lot of people had with using L1 in the L2 classroom was that it was perceived as just translating, just teaching learners to recite and memorize the words. It's no longer predominantly that way. Even if teachers don't have the

best practices in pedagogy, there's now a belief that we shouldn't just give lists of words and tell learners to memorize the words and the grammar rules. More people realize that any way that you can communicate is valid. So, if it's Hungarian words with English endings, it's fine: you're succeeding in the first steps of building confidence and fluency. I think that's been one of the driving forces behind allowing other languages into the language learning classroom. It facilitates communication.

ANDY: I'm sure the importance of communication will come up a lot in this conversation, as well as language as connection, which is the phrase you used in your own paper, Lisa. The idea of connecting has been an important theme in NISSEM's work, in the sense of connecting with others in the classroom and the school setting, and also connecting in other ways: to the community and the wider world, those different layers of connection.

Language teaching in support of sustainability, societal purposes, and whole child development

ANDY: Let's look at language teaching within the wider purpose of curriculum, school and teaching, which links back to SDG Target 4.7. Margaret, you were the impetus behind the creation of NISSEM to advocate for greater attention to the societal purposes of education and the development of personal life skills. When we were thinking about the theme for this new volume of Global Briefs, we knew we wanted to focus on a specific discipline. Although the three previous volumes do include specific subject areas, we realized that to communicate our ideas more persuasively to practitioners around the world, we need to make the briefs relevant to what practitioners themselves do. If they work in curriculum, in subject specialist areas, or as textbook writers, they're likely to be looking for practical ideas about how to adopt new thinking in their day-to-day work. From there it wasn't too difficult to decide to dedicate a volume to language learning because of the huge role languages play in creating a stage for

NISSEM's ideas. Language teaching focuses on communication and connection, so it can convey values, attitudes, and ways of acting that correspond to SDG Target 4.7 themes such as sustainable development, gender equality, respect for diversity, and human rights.

We should say also that we're not only looking at what the international education sector is sometimes most interested in, which is early grade reading. We look at the early grades, and we also look beyond. We're trying to be more holistic, with a helicopter view of teaching language in schools.

Margaret, can you comment on the themes and values of Target 4.7 and the work you previously did on learning to live together, and how this is reflected in the domain of language teaching?

MARGARET: I could look back to being in Tanzania in 1994 when half a million Rwandan refugees from the Hutu community were gathered in large camps. A nun who was providing health services said to me that this could be a good opportunity for educators in refugee schools to build the skills for peace. I can jump forward to today, and the agenda of the 2022 Transforming Education Summit at the UN in September 2022. 'Transformative learning' is intended to address global issues as well as daily life. Over the years, I've seen that for every problem, people say that one of the best methods to solve it is education. If it's the climate, or pollution, or dislike and distrust between members of a society, the answer is seen as education. I don't believe that education alone will solve any of these global and societal challenges but it should play its part. It's important that education, for example, teaches inclusion rather than exclusion, because in most societies there are times when one group is economically better off than another, or one group is putting forward some point of view which is ideological or narrow. We want to raise children who have respect for diversity at the societal level as well as in their personal lives, and avoid discrimination and exclusion.

ANDY: I hope we can return to themes such as respect for diversity and how they're reflected in the content of the curriculum, as well as in how teaching itself is practiced in the classroom and how space is given to children to express different views.

Language teaching, SEL, and relevance to learners' lives

ANDY: Let's look at the papers themselves. Abdelkader Ezzaki writes about the teaching of Modern Standard Arabic in Morocco. Ezzaki has enormous experience as an English and French teacher, as well as in teaching Arabic and reading in Morocco. His paper reflects this. It describes how social and emotional learning skills are relevant to all school disciplines, but in his view, it's in literacy and language teaching that they're most discernible and most likely to be developed, which is the underlying reason for this volume.

We can also look at the paper by Le An Vinh and Tran My Ngoc. Vinh is Director of the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Science and has played a central role in recent curriculum and textbook reforms. He and Ngoc write about the reciprocity of social and emotional learning and language learning. SEL is often promoted in educational contexts because of its known positive impact on academic performance, but the authors flip it the other way and see that language skills also affect SEL. So, it's not just the SEL that helps language learning but language learning that helps to develop SEL.

SUSAN: I think this goes back to what we talked about at the beginning. I mean, the idea of communication. Much of the language learning classroom, we hope, is about learners talking with each other. If you think about eliciting someone's opinion about something, about agreeing or disagreeing – and we explicitly teach these things in the language learning classroom in ways that facilitate or enable learners to become empathetic, or respectful, or acknowledge other people's opinions positively, or their feelings – it's clearly going to have that effect, at least for some students. It's

going to have that reciprocity between language development skills and SEL skills.

It also reminds me of Elhawary and Hargreaves' paper, from Egypt, where they specifically worked on pairwork practices and allowed kids in the English L2 class to work together to draw how they felt. They got some very powerful images from that. You wouldn't do something like that in a science class, for instance, where personal feelings are less relevant to much of the content. What is the core *content* in a language classroom? It's communication.

MARGARET: Well, we also want to encourage personal feelings and commitments in science classrooms and textbooks; for example, by showing consideration for others' health when studying the biology of microorganisms that are pathogenic, or valuing recycling and an end to harmful pollution, or respecting the local ecosystem and conserving species!

LISA: Communication certainly is the goal of language learning. Many of the papers focus on interaction. Languages are naturally learned through interaction and, reciprocally, [language] plays a big role in the development of social skills. Elhawary and Hargreaves discuss the positive impact of pairwork on young learners in Egypt. Allen Thurston and his colleagues' paper focuses on paired reading in Colombia. And of course, Nick Bilbrough and Haneen Jadallah describe their work with the Hands Up project, which entails highly interactive and personalized communication for English language students in Gaza. All these social interactions have a tremendous impact on language learning and on social and emotional learning as well.

ANDY: One of the reasons we believe the SDGs and Target 4.7 are important is because they're so important to children and young adults themselves. They're perceived as relevant to their own lives. The themes can be part of the academic content, but they also have extra significance for learners who are confronting the challenges on a daily basis. Patrice Kané has written a remarkable paper on this. Patrice lives in Mali, in West Africa, in an area of

increasing desertification as well as increasing social instability, both of which are probably caused by climate change as well as other factors. Patrice is a teacher educator for English language, as well as a teacher, who's asking himself and his own teachers and students: How do we respond to this in our daily work?

Patrice decided he needed to do more about the environment than the English curriculum covers, so he developed new materials, which speak directly to students' concerns. We can see that his students and his student teachers gain a new vision of what cutting down trees means for the future of the community and their own futures. They respond actively to these themes, and in this way the language learning is enhanced by the content, because the content has extra meaning and extra value. It's this sense of creating extra meaning for students as well as teachers because it has the social dimension, which enhances student motivation and language learning while addressing a strongly felt concern.

SUSAN: Patrice's work in Mali is closely linked to work in The Gambia, which is also experiencing the negative effects of climate change. In the paper I co-authored with Momodou Jeng and his colleagues from CREDD [the Curriculum Research Evaluation and Development Directorate] on L2 textbook development, we look at building awareness of climate change through knowledge of erosion, flooding, or mangrove depletion, but also its flip side, namely, the disaster risk reduction angle. What can learners do to cope with the disasters brought on by climate change? What kind of resiliency skills are we going to teach learners to enable them to maintain that awareness of what's happening all around them without paralyzing them to the point that they feel hopeless? It's about empowering them and giving them agency to see that they have the facts now, and then thinking about what they can do to effect change around themselves.

ANDY: Yes. Education is always about hope, right? It's how you respond in a way that gives you some agency.

Developing agency through SEL

SUSAN: I think all the papers advocate for some kind of student agency – the ability and motivation for action aligned to positive values. I was thinking of Zambia and the paper by Michael Phiri and his colleagues, focusing on Teaching at the Right Level. It's related to agency, which basically says, 'We take you where you are right now, and we try to give you the tools, give you the ability to communicate, to gain skills regardless of your situation. If you've been left behind because you haven't been able to attend school for whatever reason, you're still welcome, you still get a place to grow.'

LISA: The idea of agency comes up in the papers in different ways and it's a crucial element in responsible decision-making, which is at the core of social and emotional learning. One can't make a responsible decision without agency.

ANDY: Responsible decision-making is part of the framework that many people in the field of SEL work with – the CASEL framework – as well as other frameworks. The previous volume of Global Briefs looked at the different frameworks that various organizations and countries have developed around social and emotional learning.[4]

MARGARET: When we come to issues such as deforestation and other environmental issues, it's not just agency in personal decision-making. Students need skills to collaborate, and in particular to negotiate with people who will be affected by the changes they propose. SEL skills such as negotiation and conflict management are important for personal life but also for addressing global problems. It's very hard to actually achieve agency, even in interpersonal life and the workplace, and even harder for big social problems and environmental problems. It's not just communicating *to* others. It's the ability to listen to others, to understand multiple perspectives, and based on that to negotiate some good solutions. This is where the values

and the purpose come in. We want agency to do things that are helpful, not agency to do things that will destroy lives.

SUSAN: Debra Myhill makes an interesting point in her paper about why we make choices, and how a learner can make choices with language. She says it's to develop independence instead of to foster compliance. I think that's important. It's not that we have a set of grammar rules and you have to comply with them. It's that in L1 there are features of grammar at your disposal when you want to express something. Well, we want you to be independent, so that you can make your own choices about what to communicate and how to do it effectively.

Languages and identities

ANDY: One of the things that's traditionally expected of much L1, or dominant language, teaching is the teaching of national values and a sense of national identity and national unity. So, language learning embodies national values, even if the teaching may not be in the mother tongue of all of the learners. That's another issue that we'll come to. The national values embedded in textbooks should reflect society as a whole, although in practice they often favor the dominant group. This can be seen in many L1 or dominant language curricula and textbooks around the world. Mohini Gupta's paper on Hindi language textbooks in India looks at this. She compares the textbooks with a series of reading books from Wales, for teaching Welsh language, as a way of thinking about national and language identity through the themes of the texts that are used.

SUSAN: It's about socialization and fostering and cultivating identity through textbooks, which reach all of the children, or nearly all of them. They provide an opportunity to impart those values, the social and emotional learning, and the awareness of the importance of the SDGs, especially Target 4.7, for living together in harmony with each other and the environment. That's why it's so critical to have these concepts in there. Gupta's paper emphasizes the reach that textbooks and learning materials have on that national level, in terms of what the new [2020] National Education Policy describes as 'preserving and promoting India's cultural wealth'.

LISA: This puts a lot of pressure on textbook writers who have to choose from which angle to present material. A particular point of view can positively or negatively influence attitudes and values. This is where carefully articulated curriculum documents can go a long way in guiding materials writers to produce materials that are in line with national priorities, and to bridge the policy–practice divide.

ANDY: In my experience, this is when textbooks [especially those in dominant national languages] become controversial. It might sometimes be to do with grammar or other language points, but most times it's to do with what story, what national story, what narrative, the textbook is telling. That's when textbooks hit the front pages of national newspapers, with complaints and controversies.

Related to this is that most countries have textbook approval systems. Textbooks may be common to every government school in a particular area of the country or across the whole country, and are often in the same language for everybody, regardless of their home language. Some of our contributors have written about children being taught in a language that's not their own. At one level, there are relatively simple contexts such as the one described by Michael Phiri and his colleagues in Zambia, where the Zambia government took a decision to teach in local languages, and *through* local languages, for the first three years of school. The government has approved seven languages for this purpose. [This assumes that children reach a reading ability by the end of the third year to be able to switch to learning in English in this case, although the literature on bi/multilingual education suggests that the L1 be developed throughout primary schooling to promote effective skills transfer, where practicable].

In other contexts, children learn to read in a language that's not their own. Priscilla Cruz, or Prixie, has written an interesting overview of the challenges in the Philippines. She writes about translanguaging, as we just discussed, but the challenge for textbook writers in this situation is perhaps greater. There are political and cultural angles to this as well as pedagogical issues. Some of the solutions might include, for example, allowing publishers to provide teachers' guides in teachers' own mother tongues, even if they're teaching English [or another dominant language], or even bilingual teacher's guides. A teacher may not be comfortable reading a 300-page book in English, even if they are teaching English. Their English is just not at that level. Then there's the complex challenge of how a textbook or a pedagogy creates possibilities to support teachers to support students in both languages? Or even more than two languages in the classroom.

SUSAN: There is another layer, which is that there's a certain role for each of the languages, or prestige value for the languages. What you were saying about the teacher's guides is interesting, because sometimes, for a Ministry textbook series, you would want to have that teacher's guide in language x, not English, but it's not allowed because there's a perception that if we do this, we're saying that 'we can't cope' or 'we're not properly prepared'.

ANDY: To some extent, there's a tension between what one might call the traditional L2 language immersion method and, on the other hand, the importance of including learners' and teachers' own home languages. I mean, the importance of supporting people where they're *at*, whether you're a teacher or a student. How far can you support people where they're at? Not only in language terms, but in other terms as well.

MARGARET: The language spoken at home is closer to the heart and identity. If you exclude that identity from the class you likely revert to rote learning of rules and vocabulary without students having the opportunity to engage at a personal level, gain fluency in self-expression, and hopefully identify with the wider values we're discussing here.

LISA: Identity and language are certainly intertwined and by adding an additional language one's identity naturally expands. I found it interesting at the Hands Up conference last year[5] when Nick Bilbrough talked about how students were able to process trauma better through English as their emerging second language than they were in their first language. Somehow, they felt a little more freedom to experience and process that trauma in a foreign language that wasn't available to them in their first language.

ANDY: Ezzaki talks about that in his paper as well. He says he used to wonder why many of the students he worked with preferred French or English classes to their Arabic classes. The students seemed to feel freer to express themselves in French and English classes, even though they didn't have the vocabulary they needed. But they had the motivation that they lacked, perhaps, in the Modern Standard Arabic classes, because it's a different form of Arabic to what they speak in their daily lives.

LISA: This also ties into what Susan was saying about the roles of languages. Languages have different roles within a society but they also have different roles within an individual. People express how they feel different and behave differently in different languages. Different languages allow us to experience and experiment with other ways of being.

ANDY: SDG Target 4.7 talks about an appreciation of cultural diversity. This can be applied in various ways, but language is clearly an important dimension of cultural diversity. It's about recognizing that children need to be able to process ideas and express themselves in the language that comes to them most naturally at a particular time.

Language, pedagogy, and well-being

LISA: In their paper about the Catch Up program in Zambia, Michael Phiri and his colleagues hypothesized that the program contributes to social and emotional learning because

5 https://www.handsupproject.org/conf22info

of the joyfulness it promotes – the playfulness and the social interactivity, similar to pairwork and paired reading, which promote social interactivity. The play-based, social interactivity of the Catch Up program, designed around the approach called Teaching at the Right Level, has an effect on the social and emotional learning of the students.

ANDY: The Catch Up program in Zambia seems similar to the Speed Schools accelerated learning program in Ethiopia[6], which helps children to catch up through a play-based approach. Teaching at the Right Level [T@RL] depends on a play-based methodology. Taking that to its conclusion, it means that those children who have not been able to achieve their expected reading level for their grade will be given extra support through a play-based methodology. It's not what many people necessarily have advocated in the post-Covid response, with catch-up programs to address so-called learning loss.

We talked a little about Elhawary and Hargreaves' paper from Alexandria, Egypt, and the strong relationship of social and emotional learning to students' motivation. Elhawary and Hargreaves draw a lot on the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan, which for them suggests that people can thrive and learn creatively when they feel sufficiently competent, agentic, and socially related to others. This goes back to the notion of agency and social relations. In the words 'competence', 'agentic', and 'socially related', there's something that is essential for language teaching. The competency is the academic progress that you make – and we know the importance of that at system level – and it's important for the learner to feel they're making progress. There's also the students' agency and their social relationships in the classroom. It's not only learning *towards* improved social relations outside the classroom and later in life, but it's also about those relations *within* the classroom,

which are vital for social and emotional learning, particularly in language learning.

LISA: Yes, it's not only about the purpose and the outcome of language learning, but as Tran My Ngoc and Le Anh Vinh write in their paper, there is an important reciprocity between language learning and social and emotional learning. Learning how to use language gives children, especially very young children, the ability to verbalize, and thus process their emotions and communicate their needs. Social and emotional development is a natural by-product of language development. Adolescents also need to develop language skills for their changing lives, too!

ANDY: For Elhawary and Hargreaves, children's confidence to speak the L2 in class comes from not feeling afraid of making mistakes. Pairwork helps to develop this confidence and is an important part of Allen Thurston and his colleagues' work in schools in Colombia, which focuses on very structured pairwork. Some teachers find pairwork challenging, especially in a crowded class. How do you create the conditions for pairwork to happen, not only in L2 but also L1: for example, 'think, pair, share', which is a simple way for teachers to get students talking and listening to each other? How can textbooks give structure to pairwork? We know that many teachers skip pairwork: Bilbrough and Jadallah's paper mentions this, where teachers traditionally have skipped the pairwork exercises in *English for Palestine*.

LISA: One of the most brilliant parts of Allen Thurston and his colleagues' paper is their method for training the students – the tutors – in how to work with their reading counterparts, the tutees. Pairwork can be extremely hard to manage, and I think that's why teachers often avoid it. By giving teachers and particularly students a systematic way for implementing and participating in pairwork, perhaps the chaos is reduced and the intended outcomes are more likely to be achieved. I don't think we should expect students to be natural negotiators and collaborators, but that's what we expect when we assign them pairwork. I'm not sure what this would look like in a textbook, but if both teachers *and*

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6 Kwame Akyeampong, Jo Westbrook, and John Pryor, 'The Speed School pedagogy and how it unlocks the creative and learning potential of disadvantaged children in Ethiopia.' https://www.nissem.org/NGB2

students could be supported in the implementation of pairwork, which seems so critical for social development, perhaps they would be more likely to implement it effectively.

ANDY: It reminds us that curriculum-based textbook reforms have more of an impact when they are part of a broad approach to teachers' professional development and supported by other inputs. The textbooks can be structured to strengthen teachers' support for SEL and societal concerns, but without preparing teachers through pre-service and in-service training their impact will be limited. Textbook revisions that address the concerns raised by NISSEM need to be part of a wider intervention over a period of time, because achieving changes in teaching practices needs a multi-pronged approach.

Bui Thi Dien and Le Anh Vinh's paper on the teaching of English in Vietnam looks at the training that's been carried out, and also at the teachers' own responses. There is a clear intention in Vietnam to shift towards more focus on social and emotional learning in professional development for teachers, but from the teachers' responses the authors see that there is still a lot of work to be done. On the other hand, with what we know of Vinh and the Ministry of Education, it's very possible that they will make progress. They will make sure it is targeted and revisited until they get a result.

MARGARET: It reminds me of an earlier paper from Singapore in NGB2[7], where the MOE introduced worksheets that had greater activity requirements and relevance to our concerns. The worksheets were not welcomed initially by the teachers, but after some years they became more accepting of the methods. Obviously, NISSEM seeks to influence the training of teachers and to encourage new types of teacher learning groups, using WhatsApp and so on, to address SEL, life skills, and societal and environmental concerns; but also the textbooks themselves can help teachers to move in the direction that they may already want to go but don't exactly know how. So, the type of thing we're

[7] Jason Loh, 'Stellar curriculum materials: Supporting teachers and improving teaching practices' https://www.nissem.org/NGB2

looking at can be supported through textbook revision and can have an incremental effect over time with teachers, especially as teachers themselves become more aware, and perhaps the younger teachers in particular.

About stories

ANDY: I want to move on to the role of stories in L1 and L2. Lisa, your paper is on how stories connect learners to language, self, and others in the environment. You make it very clear that these are layers of an onion, as it were.

LISA: Stories are a great way to achieve a lot of things in the classroom. They can carry a lot into the minds of learners, from language to pro-social themes and values. The teaching can be as implicit or as explicit as we want it to be. But what I really like as a teacher is guiding students to tell their own stories, to talk about themselves, the things that are important to them, as a way for them to develop self-awareness, but also as a way to develop community within the classroom. It's much more dynamic than sitting and answering questions about a text that has nothing to do with you or your classmates. If you are telling stories with your classmates and interacting with them and learning about their lives, it's powerful. Nick Bilbrough and Haneen Jadallah describe Nick's interactions with students where stories evolve and come out through conversations: I love how their paper gives a real glimpse of what was happening in the classroom. The degree of personalization in his lessons is phenomenal and there is a lot of excitement and joy from the kids as a result. You can see how Nick uses language as communication, not as a set of grammar rules to be memorized. That's not the point of learning language, which is to connect with other people.

ANDY: Nick includes the transcripts of his conversations and also his reflections on the transcript, and his students' reflections too. It's interesting to see the different ways that pupil voices are reflected in the papers, such as in Elhawary and Hargreaves' paper too.

SUSAN: Lisa's comments remind me of the paper by Shinibali Saigal and Radhika Shenoy, and how the stories in the Pratham reading books enabled students to see themselves and their possible futures in the books. It's like there's that interim step that they highlighted, which is that in order to connect with others, we want you to see yourself first. Then the next step is reaching out, because once you see yourself and see that you are valued and acknowledged and focused on, it may make it easier to put yourself 'out there'. I think that's an important contribution from their paper.

ANDY: Pratham Books have produced hundreds of stories in multiple languages, which would be a lovely resource in any context. So, how do systems create a diversity of resources to reflect a diversity of readers? It's something that all systems need to think about.

MARGARET: The Pratham Books biographies include inspirational stories as well as reflecting diversity in society, and especially opening new horizons for girls. It's important to consider whether elements from such resources can be included within textbooks. One of the problems for textbook writers is to find inspirational and engaging biographies relevant to their country. Building a collection of such stories would be useful in many countries, and would also be a resource for textbook writers.

Scale, systems, and the availability of resources

ANDY: Jason Anderson's paper is a great study of how different contexts for creating textbooks lead to different kinds of textbooks. He looks at global editions of ELT textbooks, which are designed to be used in many countries, and textbooks that are created in national contexts in the global South.

SUSAN: I think Anderson's paper highlights some notable differences or tendencies between those textbooks produced locally by Ministries of Education and those produced by multinational publishers. In my experience, locally-produced textbooks do reflect the tendencies that Anderson has identified.

They're often focused on topics that are of importance to the nation or even nation-building. This is logical because those are contextualized textbooks. A multinational publisher may create a textbook for use by a particular Ministry of Education by adapting or customizing an existing course for a vastly different context. Or they may rely on materials developers and editors who know the international publishing market but not necessarily the values or goals of a specific nation.

ANDY: Room to Read's model is based on supporting pedagogy with good reading materials, and they've always worked with local publishers as well as local writers and illustrators. In Meenal Sarda's paper, from Room to Read, she describes how the organization pivoted around SEL during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is something we've come across in other contexts, where work on social and emotional learning suddenly had much more significance in the lockdown. We saw this, for example, in our interview with Luisa Gomez Guzmán in Colombia.[8] This increased interest in SEL has persisted, even though the lockdown is now over.

Part of Room to Read's pivoting was to promote reading aloud, using Internet connections but also encouraging parents to read aloud to their children. Sarda's paper describes the resources that Room to Read provided to parents to encourage them, where parents were literate or another family member was available to read aloud to young children during the lockdown. Reading aloud to learners is a vital part of literacy, which is not always clear in curricula. Any thoughts about where you've seen teachers reading a story to children or children reading to each other? What are the challenges and to what extent is it even accepted?

SUSAN: There has to be a place for reading aloud to pupils, especially in the early grades, alongside the work on phonics. Decoding skills are critical for developing fluency and accuracy. On the other hand, literacy and reading involve more than decoding, whether pupils

8 https://nissem.org/sel/target-4.7/renewing-textbooks/blogs-and-news/activity/responding-covid-19-colombia

are at the start of their reading journey or as they advance and develop their cognitive abilities.

MARGARET: The availability of resources is a big issue. Many teachers would be happy to take a little time to read a storybook aloud, if the books were available. But the costs mean that when supplementary reading materials are produced, often in response to donor interest, the materials are never reprinted and the efforts fade into the mists of time.

SUSAN: It can be done without large collections of books. Even with 60 kids in the classroom, they may be three at a desk or bench, and usually two aisles. The teacher can walk up and down, showing a decent-sized picture book to everybody, while reading it aloud. Even 5–10 minutes of that might build some vocabulary and stimulate interest, to help motivate a kid to want to be able to read.

ANDY: If we're committed to the principle of reading aloud, whether in L1 or L2, there are options. Shared reading and big books are a nice methodology but they're expensive or time-consuming to make, as Margaret points out. But the benefits of reading aloud to children don't necessarily depend on everybody being able to see the book or even on the book having illustrations. A teacher's resource book could include stories for reading aloud, whether in preschool, early grade, or beyond. It would be an economical way of supporting reading aloud and oral language work.[9]

MARGARET: Delhi's Happiness Curriculum includes stories for different age groups. If stories can be built into materials that are actually used, whether textbooks or other materials, you can make some headway.

ANDY: That's an important point. The designers of the Happiness Curriculum (HC) took the view that stories were central to their approach. They also decided that they wouldn't use textbooks because of the traditional view that textbooks stifle teachers' creativity and encourage rote teaching. So, for the HC lesson each

9 See also Rana Dajani, 'What is the secret sauce? The story of the We Love Reading program'. https://www.nissem.org/NGB1

day, they decided not to provide a HC textbook but to create other resources, particularly storybooks and teacher's guides. The approach is still structured around resources, but not around a textbook as such. Then again, it is just one lesson per day and there are still textbooks for the rest of the day.

Implications

Following the above conversation, the editors identified certain implications from the papers included in this volume:

- **Embedding societal, environmental, and personal development in language education materials**. Countries' language syllabi and educational materials may already include SEL goals, but not in a comprehensive way. Similarly, for societal goals and challenges. It will be helpful to find ways for the language education community at national level to explore the potential of language teaching to support education policy commitments for Target 4.7 themes and SEL.

- **Contextualizing the aims of SDG Target 4.7**. Specialists and teachers from different regions of the country can suggest key themes that are meaningful to and motivating for students, such as preserving trees and forest cover. Engaging and inspirational stories can also address these themes in a contextualized way, including authentic accounts as appropriate, in story books or embedded in textbooks.

- **Contextualizing and embedding social and emotional learning in content and pedagogy**. Language education can do this through the content of the syllabi and textbooks, and through the teaching and learning or pedagogy. *Content* can reflect the world that learners' experience, including social and emotional dimensions. Two-way communication and the connection that it brings are central learning goals for language teaching *pedagogy*. Communication is central to negotiation, collaboration, social problem-solving, and managing potential conflicts, and therefore central to personal life skills and to

SDG Target 4.7. Pairwork, supported by textbooks, can enhance communication, connection, collaboration, and language fluency, to help students build their futures as responsible and active citizens and family members.

- **Adjusting to the language ecology.** Countries may have multiple national languages, some of which may be used for teaching literacy, while others may not be used at all in formal schooling. Teachers can appropriately use a familiar language to assist in the learning of a less familiar one. This engages students at a personal level on topics of societal or personal concern, since the familiar language reaches the 'heart as well as the head'.
- **Reaching out to writers of syllabi, textbooks, and other education materials.** In order to reduce the policy–practice gap and strengthen the representation of societal, environmental, and personal goals in teaching and learning, textbooks can be written as *carriers* of, rather than *barriers* to, personal development and student agency in order to help them face the challenges and uncertainties of the 21st century. This requires support for writers to become aware of and commit to SDG Target 4.7 themes and SEL, and to ensure contextualized representation in education materials.

Following up

Specialized briefings of the kind offered in this volume can be commissioned at national or sub-regional level, as a starting point for generating context-specific action. This can ensure that language learning fully supports national education goals for national unity, respect for diversity, a culture of peace, and life skills, as well as environmental sustainability, through an SEL-based pedagogy, in order to equip young people for the workplace, their roles as citizens, and their personal lives. Global and regional sharing of such experiences and education materials can help to create a supportive context and build awareness of good practice.

This volume aims to encourage an active community of practice to address these issues, hopefully with the support of national partners, and to attract the interest of the donor community.

Section One

Mother tongue and national language

I

Socio-emotional learning in Arabic language education in Morocco: A school quality improvement endeavor

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Abstract

This paper presents an approach for integrating Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in the teaching of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in the Moroccan school system, including the curriculum, instruction, and the wider school environment. To this end, the paper provides (a) a statement of the problem, emphasizing the argument for a holistic view on language pedagogy that goes beyond academic learning and aims at the education of the 'total child', including his/her psycho-social growth, (b) an overview of the limitations of the current practices in teaching MSA, with a focus on its insufficient use as a medium for extensive self-expression and self-development, (c) a brief description of some conceptual SEL models, leading to the selection and adaptation of one of these models for the present paper, (d) the pedagogical guidelines (strategic and procedural) for a SEL-embedded approach to teaching MSA, pointing out, among other things, the need for emphasizing fluent and meaningful communication and learners' exposure to extensive MSA material, and (e) the mapping of the main SEL skill sets, along with a sample of corresponding sub-skills and learning activities. The paper concludes with a set of propositions to improve the learning of

MSA in the Moroccan school system, highlighting the treatment of SEL as an important component of improving the overall quality of the educational system

1 The problem

In the past few years, increasing attention has been drawn to the importance for schools to address the needs of the 'total child', addressing not only their academic skills but also socio-emotional learning (SEL). This attention is generated by different forces, including current psychoeducational theories (such as that of Emotional Intelligence) and the push towards human development by prominent international institutions like UNESCO and UNDP, not to mention compelling empirical evidence about the overall benefits of SEL. With these forces, we are reminded that there is a lot more to school education than academic learning and that, in fact, personal success is dependent on SEL skills more than on all other types of personal growth (academic, intellectual, vocational, etc.). Yet, despite this reminder, many educational systems continue to place near-total emphasis on academic learning and are incessantly failing to provide their students with the psycho-social skills necessary for successful integration into society and the job market.

A clear example of such a system is that of Morocco, where SEL-related deficits are becoming increasingly noticeable. These deficits are reflected not only in the low presence of SEL in school education, but also in the rising concern about educational quality, demonstrated by regrettable weaknesses in the overall psycho-social profile of school leavers and graduates. Important among these weaknesses are deficits in interpersonal communication, relational skills, and the habits of socially desirable conduct, including the upholding of positive values and attitudes. As can be expected, these deficits exert adverse effects on the graduates' ability to meet the demands of successful living and their employers' expectations and

standards – not to mention the societal dysfunctions related to good citizenship and law-abidingness.

> *Exhibit 1*: In my personal experience as an educator, I have always been intrigued and saddened by the inattention demonstrated by teachers, students, parents and decision makers vis-à-vis SEL skills, leading to such results as learners with top grades in math and science and qualifications for the French-style eminent pre-college schools (*Ecoles Préparatoires*) but with poor communication and relational abilities. In one of the programs that I coordinated in my university, the beneficiaries were top engineering students about to graduate who were excellent in their respective technical fields but were found to need extensive training in such soft skills as team work, self-management and interpersonal communication.

Although SEL skills are relevant to all school disciplines, it is in the linguistic areas that such skills are most discernible and are most likely to be developed. The goal of the present paper is to contribute to enhancing these skills in Moroccan language education, by focusing on their integration in the teaching of the main language subject (i.e., Modern Standard Arabic, or MSA). Thus, the objectives of the paper are as follows:

- Outline a conceptual background for SEL;
- Examine the place of SEL in Arabic language instruction in Morocco;
- Develop a set of propositions to improve SEL education through MSA in Moroccan schools, including both pedagogical guidelines and relevant skills and learning activities.

2 Conceptual background for SEL

2.1. Definition

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as 'the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions' (CASEL, 2017). As will be made evident later, this learning brings together skills from the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains and comprises the general abilities of self- and social awareness, self- and social management, and responsible decision-making.

2.2. SEL models and their components

The interest in SEL is rooted in different sources of different categories. The first of these categories is the holistic education movement, which calls for the full development of learners – that is, the social, emotional, and ethical dimensions, not only the academic. The second is the prominent schools of psychology (e.g., humanistic psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology) that have all directed attention to the importance of the psycho-social growth of learners. The third category is the educational guidelines set by international organizations (UNESCO, UNDP, etc.) which stress, among other things, the need for quality education, as spelled out, for example, by Sustainable Development Goal 4 that calls for promoting 'the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges' (UNESCO, n.d.). The fourth category is the extensive scholarly work being undertaken by specialized educators on the theme of SEL (e.g., NISSEM, 2019, 2020). These foundations are strengthened by the increasingly popular literature on self-development end especially the movement of Emotional Intelligence

(Bradberry, 2009) – a domain that provided the key concepts of SEL (see the CASEL framework, below).

The educational literature abounds with theoretical SEL models. In the following table, we identify four such models and spell out their main components (skills areas):

Examples of models	Main skill areas
Behavioral, Emotional and Social Skills Inventory (BESSI) (Solo et al. 2022)	Social Engagement Skills, Cooperation Skills, Self-Management Skills, Emotional Resilience Skills, Innovation Skills
OECD's Framework for Social and Emotional Skills (OECD, n.d.)	Task Performance, Emotional Regulation, Collaboration, Open-Mindedness, Engaging with Others, Compound Skills (Self-Efficacy, Critical Thinking)
5 Cs of Positive Youth Development (Lerner, 2005)	Connection, Caring, Competence, Confidence, Character
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, n.d.)	Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, Social Management, and Responsible Decision-Making

● **Table 1:** Selected SEL models

2.3. Benefits of SEL

In the school context, the literature reports that, depending on context, some SEL interventions have a significantly positive and lasting effect on different measures of educational outcomes, including those of personal and social well-being as well as academic learning. In addition, this impact is found to cut across different social and ethnic categories of learners (see, for example, Jones et al., 2015). In the wider socio-professional context, SEL is reported to have a critical role in self-development and professional success. Among other things, so-called Emotional Intelligence (expressed as Emotional Quotient, or EQ) is confirmed as being an important predictor of job performance; in fact, it is described as

contributing more professional and financial success than – and indeed not overlapping with – personality traits or Intellectual Intelligence as expressed by the traditional IQ measure (see, for example, Bradberry, 2009).

3   Examining the current SEL situation in teaching MSA in Moroccan education

3.1   SEL in official documents

The multidimensional development of school children, which necessarily comprises psycho-social learning, is one of the main themes covered in the official documents[1] on the goals of the Moroccan school system and its successive reforms. For example, the 1999 Education Charter calls for 'offering Moroccan children the conditions necessary for their opening-up and their development' and 'taking into account the expectations and needs of children at the psychic, affective, physical, artistic and social needs' (MEN, 1999, paragraph 6). Likewise, the current Vision 2030 identifies the 'promotion of the individual and society' as one of the main goals of the school system and highlights the need for 'facilitating children's socio-cultural integration' and for 'anchoring in society the values of democracy, citizenship and civic behavior' (Lever 17 – CSEFRS, 2015). The same Vision also calls for targeting the learning domains related not only to knowledge (*savoir*), but also to 'how to do' (*savoir-faire*) and 'how to be' (*savoir-être*) (paragraph 9). Converting the reform document into a binding government law, Article 2 of the *Loi-Cadre* 51-17 provides for an educational system that equips the learner with 'the virtue of productive effort and the spirit of initiative, awareness of civic engagement, responsibilities towards oneself, family and society as well as the attachment to the values of tolerance, solidarity and coexistence' (GOM, 2020).

1   The quotations from these documents are the author's own translation from the Arabic original versions.

With these statements, it is clear that psycho-social learning – in its different forms – is included in the official reform documents, although it is not referred to in these specific terms; unfortunately, such inclusion is not widely found in actual practice – in the curricula and much less in educational activities.

3.2 The focus on academic learning

The school learning that seems to receive most emphasis in Moroccan schools is academic skills. This focus seems to be rooted in the limited view held by school practitioners on school learning and success, characterized by the emphasis on children's knowledge of school subjects as opposed to personal growth. It is further reinforced by the culture of 'didactics' and 'pedagogism' (the art of teaching), which seems to dominate the literature and the discourse among teachers and teacher trainers, thereby overlooking the opportunities and experiences for learners' psychosocial development. Added to this is the powerful impact of assessment on educational practice. This impact is exerted by the international tests like PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS as well as school-based and national exams – all of which are exclusively focused on academic learning and which inevitably determine, in a washback manner, both the curriculum and the instructional practices. What makes matters worse is that, despite this focus, students' academic performance on national and international educational tests is far from being satisfactory, which only intensifies the same effort and leads to more of the same. There seems to be a dominant but unfortunate attitude among the educational community that, given students' academic underperformance, attempting to devote attention to non-academic learning is a luxury and a non-essential pursuit.

> *Exhibit 2*: In the old days, extra-curricular activities were an integral part of school learning – and for *all* students. A full half day per week used to be devoted to such activities (sports,

theatre, debating, etc.), with opportunities for students to experience all kinds of integrated skills and values such as team spirit, self-confidence, self-control, respect for the other, collaboration, and perseverance. Knowing how much this programming benefited my own generation, I find it useful to plead for its strong return to our school system.

3.3 SEL in teaching MSA

One of the most important issues in discussing the quality of Moroccan education is 'the teaching of language' (the teaching of MSA) and the 'language of teaching' (MSA as a medium of teaching content subjects). Regarding the first part of the issue (the focus of the present paper), insistent criticisms are continually leveled at its pedagogy at all instructional levels. Among other things, this pedagogy is known to be too much concerned with the structure and form of the language, as opposed to its functional uses. Using the pedagogical phraseology, the focus is less on 'teaching the language and *with* the language' (i.e., targeting linguistic skills and using the language as a vehicle for SEL content) and more on 'teaching *about* the language', accompanied by an excessive concern with linguistic correctness and the strict application of the grammatical and morphological rules, as opposed to appropriate acceptance of errors and encouraging fluent communication ('accuracy' vs. 'fluency'). Inevitably, these practices largely hinder learners' easy and confident communication through MSA. Besides, given its elevated status[2] and its restriction to school and formal contexts (therefore far removed from child socialization and home

2   In the diglossia situation, MSA and Moroccan Arabic (known as *darija*) exist side by side and form a continuum, with some versions in between. The former, in its extreme form, enjoys a higher status and is commonly restricted to formal and written communication, while the latter – also in its extreme form – has a lower status and is the language system for oral everyday interaction. Often, to simplify school learning for students, teachers resort, in their oral explanations, to intermediate versions and sometimes even to the extreme vernacular.

communication), MSA is treated essentially as a language for conveying school content and only minimally as a medium for self-expression and interpersonal communication. What complicates the situation further is the negligence of extra-curricular activities (school clubs, theater, reading circles, cinema, etc.), where students are able to strengthen not only language abilities like fluency, but also their interpersonal skills like confident communication and cooperative learning – not to mention the severely limited use of MSA in the wider public life (where other languages like the Arabic vernacular or French are more common). Together, these factors – and surely many others – converge towards minimizing opportunities for the development of learners' SEL skills through MSA.

3.4 The limits set on/by textbooks and other learning materials for MSA acquisition

Textbooks, which constitute a major learning resource, are often criticized not only for their haphazard and arbitrary design (including their physical unattractiveness), but also for not offering learners enough exposure to MSA prose material. Because of the restrictions set contractually with the publishers regarding the number of pages, textbooks do not carry numerous or lengthy texts, which severely limits learners' exposure to 'natural language acquisition'. This applies not only to language textbooks, but also to those for content subjects like science and social studies (all of which are written in MSA). This volume-related restriction is further complicated by shortcomings in the nature of the material used in the language-specific textbooks. Among other things, these textbooks are commonly perceived to be too traditional in their content. This is reflected by the non-inclusion of digital support material, the scarcity of stimulating activities, and the limited presence of topics of high interest for young learners, such as technology, current social and environmental issues, and other 'global challenges that [learners] may encounter in news bulletins'

(SDG Target 4.7). With this general perception, students are more likely to seek their self-growth learning (e.g., arts, technology, etc.) in other language systems like foreign languages (French and English) and the Arabic vernacular (*darija*). What makes self-development through MSA even more difficult is students' ever-diminishing practice of free reading (i.e., reading associated with the school library, the classroom reading corner, or home literacy habits). These shortcomings set severe limits not only on the targeted academic learning itself, but also on the opportunity for stronger socio-emotional development.

3.5 Enrichment efforts

Because of the above weaknesses, a number of initiatives have been made, over the years, to implement learning enrichment programs that provide students with self-growth opportunities. These are developed, mainly in pilot form, by international donors as a part of their collaboration with Morocco's Ministry of Education. The following are some of these initiatives:

- The Supplemental Reading Material (SRM), developed under the USAID NPR project (2019–22) to promote free reading in primary school;
- The Relevance Pedagogy program developed under USAID's ALEF project (2005–10) to help teachers find useful and real-life uses for school subjects taught in middle-school;
- The life skills program developed under USAID's ITQANE project (2010–15);
- The life skills and citizenship education program, implemented in the Middle East and North Africa in the 2010s.

The initiatives also include several versions of the School Development Project (*Projet d'établissement*) within which a number of enrichment experiences are carried out, such as the Student's Personal Project, School Clubs, and the In-School Counselling Unit (*Cellule d'écoute*). Although these initiatives targeted the entire

school system at different instructional levels, only some of their contents were integrated or scaled-up to the entire system. Despite the usefulness of the materials produced within these initiatives (guidebooks, modules, etc.), their system-wide leveraging for students' learning remains unfortunately very limited.

With the clear and long-standing awareness of Moroccan children's lack of educational preparedness for entry into the public school – including their weaknesses in using MSA – the educational authorities have recently launched a policy of instituting pre-schooling as a part of the official primary education. The purpose is to provide a badly needed enrichment to primary education by reducing the initial educational and linguistic gap between home socialization and the official school requirements. It is strongly hoped that some important gains will accrue from this initiative. This will be possible if (a) the policy is scaled-up to the entire country, with positive discrimination in favor of the remote and the non-Arabic-speaking (Amazigh) population, and (b) the pre-schooling programs reflect certain quality requirements such as the proper training of teachers and the careful production of adequate MSA material, including the leveraging of the language corpus that is common between MSA and the Arabic vernacular (spoken at home).

Exhibit 3: My work in some of the above-mentioned enrichment programs enabled me to build the conviction that the language issue in the Moroccan school system is essentially attributable to the multi-faceted problem of quality of instruction and materials. This conviction was reinforced by the opportunity offered to me to lead the piloting of a number of instructional approaches intended for the enhancement of learning quality in our middle schools, including the improved use of MSA. One of these approaches is a middle-school program of Reading Across the Curriculum that enabled students to read more widely, learn more academic content and, in so doing, develop greater proficiency in MSA. This program was later adopted

by the Ministry of Education for national scale-up. Another approach was the so-called Relevance Program, intended to develop, through teacher training and participatory material development, ways of ensuring real-life uses of academic disciplines, including the practice of MSA skills (such as fluency in oral communication).

4 Improving SEL education through MSA in Moroccan schools

4.1 Adapting the CASEL model

The SEL model selected as the core for the present paper is the one proposed by CASEL, while making sure to (a) draw on other models, especially in defining the main SEL components, (b) integrate key and relevant subskills for each component, (c) highlight language as the vehicle for the expression of these subskills, and (d) add the relevant values and attitudes for each of the components. Thus, the language (MSA) curriculum – in both its design and implementation – will, of course, be guided and framed by the usual concepts like reading and writing, themes, literary genres, etc. However, at the same time, it will make sure to integrate SEL components. This adaptation is reflected in the following two sections.

4.2 Pedagogical guidelines

a) Strategic

These guidelines pertain to the curricular orientations of the language program (design and approach).

- *Treating language teaching holistically*: True language learning is more than the acquisition of discrete language skills or components (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, communicative functions); neither is it limited to the practice of the subskills of

language arts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) or the accumulation of information about a theme or literary piece of work. In addition to all these components and subskills, learning a language is a human process of combining cognitive and non-cognitive skills in both comprehension and production. Central to this process are the elements of emotions, values, and attitudes.

- *An integrated approach to SEL*: Although there exist, around the world, educational programs specifically and entirely devoted to SEL, no such program can be considered for MSA in the Moroccan formal school system. What is highly feasible, instead, is the integration of the SEL skills within the other components of the language curriculum such as language arts, themes, and literary genres. This embedded approach applies also to extra-curricular programs such as educational clubs (e.g., theater and cinema).

- *Primacy of fluent communication*: Although the communicative approach is more commonly associated with foreign language teaching, it is nevertheless highly relevant to teaching the primary language of schooling (in our case, MSA). Linguistic descriptions (e.g., grammar, morphology, etc.) and literature are certainly useful academic subjects; however, they are not very helpful if they do not seek the development of fluent communication. Numerous are those who are widely knowledgeable about a language, its structure, and its literature but who are unable to use that language in efficient communication. It is only with active and extensive practice of the target language that mastery can be achieved. And it is with this mastery that learners can achieve a variety of SEL skills such as confident and interpersonal communication.

- *Extensive exposure to (and use of) the language*: Learning a language is not efficient when it is limited to teacher-mediated lessons or the completion of assigned language tasks; instead, it requires exposure to (and interaction with) copious texts – through extensive reading and listening – along with frequent writing and speaking. It is with these activities that learners become able to approximate the 'natural approach' of language acquisition and thus internalize not only language features, but also SEL content such as understanding emotions and social management.

- *Meaningfulness in the activities*: Learning a language is not the memorization of linguistic rules or the mechanical manipulation of linguistic features. It is, instead, the exposure to – and the production of – meaningful text that is comprehensible and closely related to learners' prior knowledge and real-life experience. It is with this kind of material that language learners can achieve not only better mastery of the language, but also internalize (that is, through deeper learning) the meanings conveyed, including the SEL content.

- *The central place of desirable emotions, values, and attitudes:* These are best communicated and developed through language material and instruction. Through this medium, students learn to express and monitor such emotions as joy, wellness, compassion, empathy, admiration, appreciation, and disappointment. They also have the opportunity to reinforce different values categorized as: (a) national (e.g., sense of identity, good citizenship, law-abidingness, valuing cultural heritage), (b) ethical (e.g., truth, authenticity, integrity, humility), (c) social (e.g., respect for others, commitment, solidarity, equality, justice), (d) behavioral (e.g., perseverance, rationality, responsibility), and (e) universality-related (e.g., global-mindedness, cultural diversity). These values are the principles that determine decisions about what is right or wrong and are the basis for acquiring attitudes such as open-mindedness and critical thinking.

- *SEL across the curriculum:* Although language, as a school subject, is the main vehicle for SEL, a good contribution to this learning can come from other disciplines including, among others, Islamic Education and Social Studies, both of which are major sources for ethical and behavioral guidelines associated with SEL. Equally beneficial are the extra-curricular activities that provide important opportunities for integrated socio-emotional skills.

- *SEL across all grade levels*: As is the case with most learning content and skills, SEL is not limited to any particular stage in school education; instead, it should be present in all grade levels and considered an integral part of the learner's development.
- *Narrowing the gap between the language of the home and MSA – the language of schooling:* This consists in non-educational as well as educational strategic measures such as (a) leveraging, in the educational material, the language corpus that is common between the two varieties of Arabic, especially in preschool and early primary grade levels, (b) promoting the use of MSA material in the media and the wider public life, (c) encouraging more fluency in MSA communication, including less emphasis on accuracy and more tolerance of deviations from formal rules, (d) encouraging MSA-mediated cultural activities for children inside and outside school (digital libraries, reading clubs and contests, neighborhood circles, etc.). These and other similar measures will no doubt greatly facilitate the greater and gradual adoption of MSA as the vehicle for socio-emotional growth.

b) Procedural

The following guidelines are more directly related to instructional practices:

- *Stress-free learning:* A successful SEL-oriented class, whatever the subject, is one in which learners engage in their activities without anxiety or fear. This condition, highlighted by Krashen's Natural Approach – notably the 'affective filter' principle – is best achieved not only through a positive rapport between the teacher and the students, but also by the creation of a pleasant classroom atmosphere, using such devices as language games, icebreakers, and energizers – all of which help the students develop socio-emotional skills as well as encourage their engagement in their learning.

- *Modelling SEL skills and behaviors*: Through their overall attitude and behavior – and apart from the set curriculum – teachers are able to impart different messages and impact their students' overall learning, including the fostering of SEL skills. These skills, regardless of how well they are reflected in instructional content, will not develop among students unless they are consistently and concretely demonstrated in teachers' conduct at school and in class.
- *Collaboration*: In effective teaching, the instructor engages the class in interactional activities. By its nature, the class is a social setting that offers extraordinary opportunities for all types of learning. With the whole class or in small groups, students not only facilitate each other's learning, but also practice such behavioral skills as controlling emotions, appropriate interpersonal communication, managing social differences, and collaborative routines.
- *Use of artistic and gaming activities*: Activities like singing, poetry reading, and play are a channel not only for the promotion of art education or language practice, but also for language-mediated development of socio-emotional skills.
- *Textbooks and other support materials*: For language textbooks to be effective learning tools, they need to reflect the accepted norms, including attractive design, the inclusion of self-learning activities (like digital material) and most importantly copious and stimulating texts to enhance exposure to the target language. Additionally, they should not be the only resource and must, instead, be accompanied by books for free and pleasure reading.
- *Differentiation:* In the modern educational literature – and based on empirical evidence – differentiation of instruction has become a required practice for effective school education. With the rising call for equity in schooling and the ensuing approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level (TARL) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), language teachers are encouraged to accommodate, as much as possible, the needs of students at different ability levels.

Exhibit 4: In my experience of training English teachers for high school, I often wondered why classes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are generally more successful than those of Arabic and French. Students study English for no more than three years, yet most of them finish high school with relatively better skills than in MSA or French, which they study (almost) throughout their primary and secondary school. In their comparative observations and surveys, some of my trainee teachers reported that one of the differences lies in the instructional methodology. In the English classes, students are more actively engaged in their learning, including the use of communicative activities, the encouragement of fluency, gaming, and the appeal to students' diverse interests and needs (artistic, emotional, etc.).

4.3 SEL-embedded MSA programs, skills, and learning activities

In the table on pages 54–57, we present the CASEL domains – adapted for MSA – along with samples of related subskills and illustrative learning activities. In Component 1 – and as mentioned earlier – these SEL-specific elements are to be integrated with the usual curriculum-framing constituents such as themes, language arts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), language phenomena (e.g., grammar), communicative functions, and possibly literary genres or notions.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to draw attention to the usefulness of a holistic view on school education in Morocco, with a focus on SEL in teaching MSA. The overriding principle is that school learning should target the student's overall development and not be limited to academic objectives. Rather than arguing for a stand-alone and specialized SEL program, the paper provides an approach in which

SEL is systematically and intentionally integrated within a multi-faceted framework that comprises themes, grammatical and lexical skills, communicative functions, and, possibly, literary genres and notions.

It is clear that a lot needs to be done to improve the teaching of MSA in the Moroccan school system so that the language becomes a natural medium of overall personal growth. The desirable changes include (a) more emphasis on 'teaching language and *with* the language' (i.e. targeting the mastery of linguistic and SEL skills), as opposed to 'teaching *about* the language', (b) the improvement of the quality of textbooks, including the use of MSA as a medium of genuine and personal communication and as a means of conveying modern content, including contemporary national and global challenges of concern to young people, (c) the use of active and stimulating instructional methods, (d) the students' exposure to copious reading and listening material, (e) the integration of reading and writing in the teaching of content subjects, (f) the enhancement of extra-curricular programs for the reinforcement of MSA-mediated self-development, (g) quality pre-schooling and widening access to it by rural children, and (h) the promotion of MSA through its wider use in the public and socio-cultural context.

It is recognized in this paper that developing a balanced SEL program in the Moroccan school system faces important challenges. In addition to the pedagogical issues raised above, SEL-focused educational activities are often compromised by school-related difficulties (such as class size, the scarcity of resources, the loss of valuable class time, and the already overloaded curriculum), by the complex sociolinguistic situation (the mismatch between the language of the home and the one used at school – MSA), and by socio-educational weaknesses as expressed by the inability of families to support their children's healthy psycho-social growth. However, although these challenges are real, they should drive the system to redouble its effort towards compensatory measures so as to provide effective school learning.

Component 1: Curriculum and instruction		
SEL domain	*SEL skills: Using oral and written language (MSA) to:*	*Illustrative learner activities: Using MSA for:*
Self-awareness	• Reinforce one's sense of identity; • Demonstrate awareness of one's descriptive attributes (own abilities, emotions, thoughts, strengths, weaknesses) and actions; • Strengthen one's self-confidence and self-efficacy; • Demonstrate awareness of healthy living habits (hygiene, nutrition, etc.); • Clarify one's values and attitudes.	• Reading and discussing texts on useful psychological topics for self-understanding (e.g., emotions, personality types, positive conduct, etc.); • Viewing and discussing videos on good conduct (e.g., Moroccan soccer champions accompanied by their mothers in the 2022 World Cup); • Studying vocabulary and phrases on human emotions, values, and attitudes; • Presenting oneself; • Conducting self-analysis (e.g., using language to describe one's thoughts, and feelings vis-à-vis a story character, an issue or experience); • Relating academic content (concepts, themes) to one's prior knowledge and experience; • Keeping a journal (describing and commenting on personal experiences); • Studying vocabulary on human feelings (shades of meanings); • Doing mindfulness activities (using language to question one's own state of mind, one's comprehension and learning, one's strengths, ways of improving oneself, etc.); • Doing role plays and simulations about socio-emotional skills; • Critiquing one's habits of healthy living; • Debating on values and attitudes; • Doing artistically expressive activities (singing, theatre, etc.); • Expressing oneself orally (oral reading, poetry reading, etc.); • Studying emotions and personality in story characters.
Self-management	• Regulate emotions, including the control of stress and impulses; • Maintain self-discipline and self-motivation • Plan, implement, and evaluate personal behavior and action; • Express appreciation of diversity and respect for others; • Demonstrate the use of organizational habits; • Mark belongingness to social groups (peers, family, community, nation, world).	• Reading and discussing texts on useful psychological topics (e.g., emotions, personality types, etc.); • Studying vocabulary and phrases on self-management; • Writing and speaking activities on one's plan to improve personal behavior and habits; • Studying exemplary habits and skills in story characters; • Giving oral presentations and doing role plays about self-management; • Keeping a personal journal on personal action and emotions; • Conducting self-assessment of achievements.
Social awareness	• Show understanding of conditions and issues in social settings; • Demonstrate sensitiveness to the attributes of others, including their emotions, values, attitudes, needs, interests, status, and expectations;	• Reading and discussing texts on topics of social psychology (e.g., prejudice, culture, social influence, interpersonal relations, etc.); • Studying characters in a story; • Studying the character and conduct of historical figures;

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	• Show readiness for perspective-taking and empathy with other.	• Describing the mood and character of individuals in a group picture; • Training on problem-solving in social contexts (what to do in what situation); • Speaking or rewriting material with different perspectives; • Studying case studies on proper conduct.
Social management	• Create and maintain healthy relationships, • Mobilize the habits of perspective-taking and empathy; • Appreciate diversity and respect for others, • Communicate effectively with others, including active listening; • Demonstrate the respect of social engagement and teamwork; • Control negative emotions with others (anger, hate, frustration); • Make friends, enjoy the relationships with them, and solve relational conflicts.	• Reading and discussing texts on topics of social management (e.g., social groups, social engagement, avoidance of negative forces like hate, etc.); • Studying the vocabulary and phrases of empathy, gratitude, and kindness; • Collectively developing and enforcing a class charter (using language to describe desirable relationships, roles, and habits); • Participating in group activities and projects reflecting social management rules; • Playing language games to reflect desirable behaviors; • Giving and seeking positive feedback; • Following directions; • Giving presentations and doing role plays to reflect healthy social relationships; • Collectively drafting and applying rules of working in a group; • Taking responsibilities in a group; • Discussing famous sayings about good conduct; • Studying emotions, values, and attitudes in addressing a social issue; • Reading and discussing case studies on proper social relationships. • Exercises on conflict resolution (among students and others).

• **Table 2** SEL framework for MSA, with illustrative subskills and learning activities

Behind this entire paper and the interest in SEL is an overall concern with the overarching issue of quality in Morocco's school education. This concern is not only for the underperformance of Moroccan school children in their academic assessments, but also for their socio-emotional growth. While no one can deny the importance of academic skills, it is this growth that ensures relatively more successful integration of learners into society and the work place.

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Using cooperative learning to enhance reading in Colombia

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Abstract

Paired reading is a form of cooperative learning where two school students take the role of tutor (the better reader) and tutee (the reader with the lower level of development). They read together and errors are corrected, praise is given, and questions are asked about the text being read. There is therefore, a strong need for social interaction between the peers. It has strong evidence as a low-cost technique to improve reading in western European contexts.

Evidence for efficacy beyond western Europe is limited. This paper will describe the theory and existing evidence for the effects of paired reading. It will then report results from a development randomized controlled trial of paired reading in four elementary schools in Colombia. The paired reading group showed positive effects (effect size +0.16) on a standardized reading test in Spanish. The trial was a collaboration of research teams from the United Kingdom, Colombia, Chile, and China.

Introduction

Colombia was ranked 59th out of 71 countries in the last PISA 2018 assessments of international reading (OECD, 2018). School students in Colombia, therefore, lag two years behind world average reading attainment. Paired reading is an evidence-based, cost-effective way to improve reading in schools and close the reading gap among students with low literacy levels. The use of paired reading has been successful in the United Kingdom (Thurston and Topping, 2007; Tymms et al., 2011; Cockerill and Thurston, 2015), and a Latin American Spanish version was developed to be used in an exploratory trial to determine if the effects of the pedagogy can be transferred to Spanish language primary/elementary school contexts.

The paper will give a brief overview of research on cooperative learning. It will then describe a form of cooperative learning, 'peer tutoring', in which a peer with better reading competences (called the tutor), works with a peer with lower competence in reading (called the tutee) to help reading development (this technique is often called paired reading in the literature). The more competent student monitors the reading, correcting errors, praising the student who is working at a lower level, and is also tasked with

asking questions to promote talk and understanding of the text (this is described in more detail later in this work). The processes of organizing learning of this nature in the classroom will be described. The research findings will be reported from an exploratory study that took place in four schools in Bogota, Colombia, over a period of 10–12 weeks, from March to July, 2021.

Theoretical framework

Peer tutoring is a structured form of cooperative learning characterized by specific role-taking as either tutor or tutee. Tutoring involves cognitive challenge from peers and post-interaction reflection and restructuring, wherein tutor and tutee fulfil their roles to effectively create social interdependence. Their individual success is linked through common goals and mutual dependence and is the process by which gains in the tutoring process accrue.

For co-operative learning to be present during peer tutoring then, social interdependence must be present in the form of:

- *Goal structure*: The pair work together with the aim of reading and understanding a piece of text;
- *Positive interdependence*: In the tutoring process, clear patterns for interaction are defined during training in the roles of tutor and tutee (these patterns have been developed through research and evaluation to optimize them);
- *Individual accountability*: Both the tutor and tutee have responsibilities. In the form of tutoring used, each must reflect on both their own and their peer partner's performance;
- *Interaction patterns*: The tutoring process is structured to stimulate promotive interaction and group processing, and to enhance social skills.

Thurston and Topping (2007) developed a theoretical model of cognitive development that occurs during peer tutoring. In summary: students read a text together. The tutor listens to the tutee read. The tutor supports the tutee by reading hard sections together and when reading errors occur, the tutor will also ask the tutee questions. Reading together/alone, forward scanning the text whilst thinking of questions, and the processing of prior knowledge using metacognitive strategies to link previous learning to the current problem, all require social interdependence (Johnson, Johnson & Roseth, 2010). These processes both facilitate self-regulation and result in enhanced metacognition, facilitating the assimilation of learning, the accommodation of new ideas, and enhanced lexicon (Topping & Ehly, 1998). Paired reading pairs an older tutor with a younger tutee because optimal performance of paired reading requires there to be an attainment differential between tutors and tutees. Without the gap, both tutor and tutee can be under-stimulated (Greenwood, Terry, Arreaga-Mayer & Finney, 1992).

Paired reading and literacy development

Using paired reading should develop a number of key literacy concepts as part of the language curriculum. These include:

1.1 Competence in reading

- Mastering new words and vocabulary;
- Being clear, coherent, and accurate in spoken and written communication;
- Reading and understanding a range of texts and responding appropriately;
- Developing a heightened sense of reading self-concept.
- *Creativity and context*
- Making fresh connections between ideas, personal experiences, texts, and words, drawing on a rich experience of language and literature.

1.2 Cultural understanding of literature

- Gaining a sense of the literary heritage and engaging with important texts in it;
- Exploring how ideas, experiences, and values are portrayed differently in texts from a range of cultures and traditions.

1.3 Critical understanding of literature

- Engaging with ideas and texts, understanding, and responding to the main issues;
- Assessing the validity and significance of information and ideas from different sources (this is most likely to happen when reading non-fiction literature such as newspapers or magazines);
- Exploring others' ideas and developing the ability to express their own.
- Analyzing and evaluating spoken and written language to appreciate how meaning is shaped;
- Developing the ability to extract and interpret information from texts; inferring and deducing the intensions of the writer; justifying their own ideas on what they have read; understanding the nature and purpose of text; understanding how meaning is created through the use of text.

1.4 Reading for enjoyment

- Developing their enjoyment of reading and the enjoyment of sharing written texts with a partner.

1.5 Speaking and listening about texts

- Enhancing speaking and listening skills as pairs talk about and explore the meaning of the text they are reading.

- **Figure 1:** Aspects of paired reading

What is paired reading?

Training

It is important to train both tutors and tutees in the processes of paired reading. Most teachers have found training them together works well, but it is important to clearly identify to tutor and tutee respectively, what their roles and responsibilities are. We have normally suggested two staff members model the technique for students. There are also a number of videos we make available to schools (in the project that follows we made new materials in Spanish for students to see how it worked).

Paired reading

Paired reading is a form of reading together and structuring academic talk surrounding text (Thurston & Cockerill, 2017). It has five main aspects:

- Choosing the right book;

- Supported reading;
- Error correction;
- Questioning;
- Praise.

These five aspects are all inter-related and are represented in Figure 1.

Choosing the right book

A long-established feature of the paired reading process is that tutees select their own book. The tutee is instructed to select a book with content that would interest them. This may be from magazines, library books, newspapers, storybooks, or even football programs. Any sort of reading material is suitable. However, the teacher may have to exercise some degree of editorial control over content. This will help pairs to experience different genres of text and ensures that the book chosen is at the right level of reading difficulty.

The tutee should select a book of the correct readability using a 'five finger technique'. For this, the tutee should open the book on a random page and place five fingers onto the page. The tutee should attempt to read the words under the fingers. The tutee should repeat this for another four pages. If they can read all the words on the five pages, the book selected is too easy. There is no decoding involved in the process (as this is not a feature of the technique). The tutee attempts to read the whole world and success, or failure is gauged by their success at doing so. Tutees should be advised to choose a book where they make between about 2–3 errors (out of the 25 words read). This may seem a strange way in which to assess the suitability of the reading level of a book. However, it is quick and has been used in previous projects and seems to work well. (Alternatives such as testing the reading ability of students, converting their scores to reading ages and then calculating the reading age of the text selected to ensure it was suitable were tried in the pilot of a previous study. This method was found to be no more effective than using the five-finger test.) The book chosen by the tutee has to be above the independent readability level of the tutee, but below that of the tutor. This will facilitate the tutor being able to help the tutee by correcting their errors. A rough guide as to what has been found to be the correct 'error rate', would be expecting to hear one error about every minute.

Supported reading

The cycle of paired reading alternates between the tutor and tutee reading together and the tutee reading alone. The tutor helps the tutee gain confidence by modulating the speed of their reading to be just behind the reading of the tutee. This is important because we want the tutee to be reading a book that is slightly harder than their independent reading ability. In addition, the tutor provides a good model of reading for the tutee. They may be able to read with more expression or intonation and this may help the tutee to be more expressive when reading out loud. The tutor and tutee start by reading together. They agree on a signal that the tutee will give when they want to read alone. The tutee signals to read alone when they feel confident enough to tackle the text reading independently. On giving the signal, the tutor stops reading out loud but continues to follow and monitor their tutee. The tutor should aim to read with the tutee when they start reading and when a mistake is made by the tutee.

Error correction

When an error occurs, the tutor waits 4–5 seconds, and if the tutee does not self-correct, the tutor corrects the tutee. Tutors should not jump in and correct the word as soon as a mistake is made. The rule is that tutors pause and give the tutee 4–5 seconds to see if they will put it right by themselves. This allows tutees space to self-correct. It needs practice, however. After an uncorrected error, the tutee repeats the error word correctly, the tutor gives praise and the pair read together again until the tutee signals to read alone again. Then the tutee reads alone until the next error that is not self-corrected. This process of error correction is central to the successful

implementation of the technique in classrooms and is a non-fussy way of correcting errors. By not stopping to decode words using phonics, the flow of the reading is maintained and the focus remains on the overall text/story rather than the mechanics of reading individual words. It has a number of important features that include waiting to correct errors, using the correct process to correct errors (an important part of this is praising once the tutee self-corrects), moving smoothly between the tutor/tutee reading together and the tutee reading alone, and, most importantly, supporting the tutee with praise (for reading the word correctly) and by reading together after an error.

The paired reading cycle

The actual process and cycle of paired reading is shown in the flow diagram in Figure 2. In the early stages of establishing paired reading, copies of the flow diagram should be given to each pair to remind them of what they should be doing.

Questioning

One of the keys to getting the most benefit from paired reading and promoting academic talk is to get effective questioning going during the tutoring session. Put simply, this should involve tutors and tutees asking each other questions about the book:

1 Before reading

- About the book/text and similar texts they have read before;
- About the author and the author's style (if they have read something by the same author);
- The reasons for choosing the text, personal links to the story and/ or the author.

2 During reading

- Asking questions to make sure the tutee understands what has been read;

- Asking questions to help the tutee understand what has been read, and what is happening in the text;
- Ask questions that require the tutee to predict what may happen next (in fiction literature);
- Asking questions to show interest in the text;
- Asking questions to show it matters and links to wider aspects of life (this is important as it then provides an authentic context for reading and additional insight into the meaning of what is being read).

3 After reading

- About what was read. (This is an important place where the tutee can ask questions. We have often found that making a 'quiz' for your tutor can be fun for the tutee.)
- About what was and was not enjoyable;
- About how reading could be improved (for instance to read with more expression or read with more fluency), or indeed about how the text itself could have been improved.

Such questioning could take place at a number of different levels. It may be important to give guidance to the tutors and tutees about the sort of questioning that would be appropriate. As part of this project we developed Question Mats[1] at four different levels to help this process, ranging from simple process and opinion questions such as 'What do you think will happen next?', 'Why did you select this to read?' or 'Do you like this book?' to much more conceptually-based discussions. For example, The Trumpet of the Swan by EB White could be interpreted as a love story between two swans. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as a voyage of difference, identity, finding one's own identity and an analogy for aspects of the American civil rights' movement in 1960s America. Mats will need to be at differentiated levels for students. Students should keep them on the desk as they read to act as an aide memoire to help prompt and frame effective

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1   These are cards with prompt questions printed or written on.

questioning. Some teachers prefer to let students design their own question mats. In some classes, laminating the mats has given them longevity (and allowed pairs to write and make notes on the mats using 'dry-wipe' marker pens), but plastic wallets can be just as effective for protecting the mats.

Some teachers have found it useful to have Quiz Time as part of the tutoring session. This could take place at the beginning, mid-point, or end of the session. Teachers have tended to stop the whole class from reading to ask the tutors and tutees to think up questions for each other. If this is in the middle of the paired reading session, it is best to give the class warning that they need to find a suitable place to take a break from their reading. Then they ask their questions. In more competitive classrooms, some pairs have kept a 'score' of who answered more correctly, turning this into an unofficial competition.

Praise

It is very important that the tutor enthusiastically and sincerely praises the tutee as they read. It is important to work with the tutors to find different ways to praise the tutee. There are set points during the paired reading cycle where the tutor should praise the tutee, including when transferring to reading alone and after the tutee corrects an error. However, praise should not be limited to these points; spontaneous praise from the tutor should also be encouraged (e.g., for reading with good expression or fluency). Praise is very important. It promotes positive attitudes to reading, builds self-concept in reading, and reinforces correct patterns in reading behavior. It is something that often is difficult to generate in classrooms and requires discussion and practice to get right (and ensure praise does not become superficial).

Self-assessment

Tutees also need to learn to 'self-assess' by reflecting on their reading and how it is improving. The tutor can help this process, as can the teacher. The teacher can model effective praise during
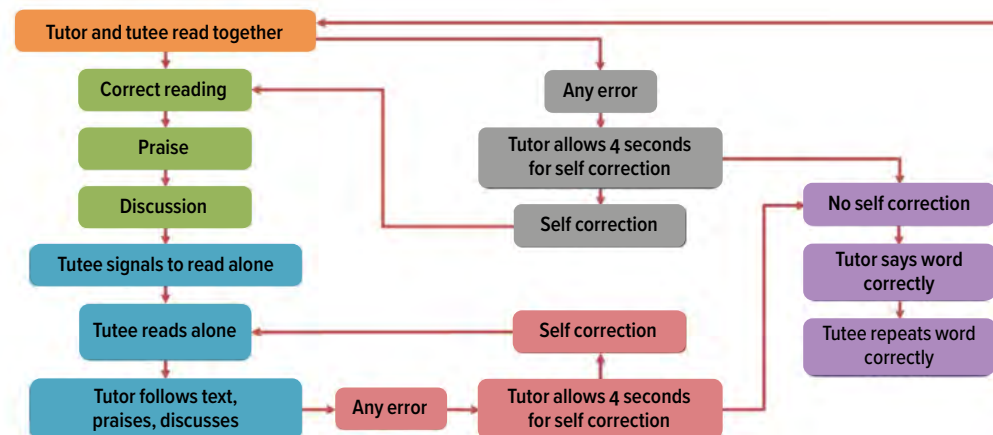
Figure 2: The process of paired reading

the session, by saying, for example, 'John is reading with great expression' or 'Siobhan is tackling difficult words well today.' Tutees should try to identify how their reading is improving by recording this in a diary or log book.

Peer formative assessment

One of the main features of the paired reading process is peer formative assessment. There have been a number of successful policy initiatives on formative assessment such as Assessment is for Learning (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2003) and Assessing Pupils' Progress (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008) in England and Wales. The common goal of these formative assessment strategies is to review assessment in short cycles (often per lesson) and to use this information to address gaps in students' learning, thus providing an element of personalized learning. Paired reading gives a pedagogic medium within which peer formative assessment can be effectively developed.

Organizing paired reading

Selection and matching of student pairs

All students can undertake paired reading. Ideally, students should work in a pair that remains constant. However, student absence through illness or other reasons may mean that some pairs have to change temporarily. This is not a significant issue. Triads can also be formed if there are uneven numbers of older and younger students, or within the class if same age pairs are being used. Triads can work well during paired reading. However, the role of the 'third student' should be defined as either that of tutee or tutor. There are a number of possibilities to help with this:

If the third student is from an older class, they should become a tutor. If from a younger class, they should become a tutee.

If the triad forms with two tutees, they should be of similar ability. The tutees should share the time of the tutor by reading the same book, or by choosing different books and having the tutor switch attention as they read.

If the triad forms with two tutors, then the roles of tutors can be more flexible. One triad member could be used to cover absenteeism. The tutors should share their roles.

Matching of pairs

Reading ability should be the initial pairing criteria. For cross-age paired reading there should be a two-year difference between the older and younger class (e.g., grade 5 and grade 3). The following steps should be followed when selecting the pairings:

1. Students are paired according to reading ability from highest to lowest in the older and younger classes. Teacher judgement or test results may be used to determine the pairings.
2. The two highest ability students from each class are paired together, followed by the next two highest ability students, and so on until all students are matched with another student.

For same age paired reading:

1. Students are paired according to reading ability from highest to lowest in the class. Find the mid-point on the list.
2. The best reader from the class (tutor) is paired with the best reader from the mid-point of the list of students (tutee), the second-best reader from the top half (tutor) is paired with the second-best reader from the bottom half (tutee), and so on until everyone has a partner.

Other factors may have to be taken into consideration, such as, for example, gender, maturity, and personality. If ability-based pairing has problems because of one of these factors, the tutor can be chosen from the next one in line. In rare instances in post primary/secondary/high school, it has been reported that gender can interact to negatively affect a pairing. This might occur when a younger tutee is male and an older tutor is female or when some pairs are too diverse in terms of physical size and maturity. In practice, the fears of the younger male tutee can dissipate during the act of tutoring. Once matched and when any teething problems have been resolved, the pairs should remain stable. Only a serious incident should result in the reconstitution of pairs at this point.

Organization of contact

Tutoring should take place in normal school hours during timetabled contact time. Schools should identify an appropriate time and the classes/subject areas. Once paired, half of the students should work in one classroom, and the other half in another.

Tutoring sessions should last for about 30 minutes. This includes time to move students between classes. In reality, the students should expect to engage in paired reading for about 20 minutes, once per week, for a duration of between 12 and 16 weeks. Previous studies found that there was no additional benefit to undertaking paired reading more than once per week (Tymms et al., 2011). The students should sit comfortably close to each other at a desk or in a quiet corner of a library, for example. The point is that the pairs

Introducing paired reading

There are many stages in the paired reading procedure and it is beneficial to introduce it over three sessions. The first session focuses on explaining what paired reading is and why it is being undertaken. In terms of the paired reading process, the first session focuses on choosing a book at the right level (five finger tests) and then switching between reading alone and reading together, including error correction. The second session focuses on modelling praising and consolidating error correction. The third session practices the previous techniques and introduces questioning. This last session also uses three 'question time' breaks: one before reading, one about halfway through the session, and one after reading. The question mat helps with this technique.

Trouble shooting

Throughout the session, the teacher monitors the pairs, intervening only when a pair is unable to move forward with the process. Some common problems include:

Personality clashes: This can include over-dominant partners, cultural differences, and gender issues. Teachers are encouraged to help the pair identify and resolve the problems. Only as a last resort should the pairings be changed.

Poor communication: This can include pairs who find the process too complex. The teacher can suggest staying focused on the 'error correction' and 'praise' parts of the technique. Writing down additional questions that could be asked at the end of a reading session can also help. The teacher can take the role of tutor to both students in order to model how to structure the process effectively.

Pace and challenge: Some pairs may race through books and finish quickly, making few, if any, errors. A good technique for a pair such as this is to ask them to select a more challenging book or to focus on asking regular questions. Pairs who struggle and make too many errors should be encouraged to choose easier books. Previous experience has indicated that this may be a particular issue for male tutees who have low reading ability. They may try to hide their true reading ability by choosing an overly complex book. However, making too many errors will be counter-productive and previous research has shown that it will inhibit the potential benefits of peer tutoring.

Praise: Previous work suggests that students find it difficult to praise each other. Teachers can run specific sessions on how to praise and encourage students. They have also developed 'praise' help cards. There is strong research evidence to suggest that when students feel that they are good at a subject, they start to perform better in subsequent tests. Students have reported that when they get praise from their tutors it helps them persevere for longer with tricky reading problems. This is tied into the substantive literature on self-concept as a predictor of future academic attainment in reading (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984; Marsh, Plucker & Stocking 1997).

How did it work in Colombia?

Sample

Four state-funded elementary schools in the Bogota area took part, with a minimum level of disadvantage of at least 85% as defined by the Colombian classification of socioeconomic status. Two of the schools implemented paired reading with children of higher reading attainment tutoring children of lower reading attainment in either grade 3 or grade 5 classes. Two schools served as control. This gave a control group of four classes. The final sample was composed of four schools, eight classes and 298 students. The four schools were paired with their closest school in terms of socio-economic indicators and prior Spanish reading attainment. They were allocated to their condition randomly using a random number generator program for iPhone: Version 5.5, 123 The Random Number Generator by Nicolas Dean. This is set to generate an equal number of 0=control (N=2) and 1=paired reading (N=2) schools.

Two hundred and ninety-eight students took part, comprising 183 grade 5 students, and 136 grade 3 students. One-hundred and forty-two students were randomized to the control condition and 176 were randomized to the paired reading condition. Sixty-six grade 3 students and 76 grade 5 students were allocated to the control group. Sixty-nine grade 3 and 107 grade 5 students were randomized to the paired reading group. The mean age of the sample was 11.41 years (SD 1.95). All 298 students were entitled to free-school meals. The control group was a wait-treatment control and they undertook normal classroom activities in reading during this period.

Reading material

One of the important aspects of this project was to provide the schools with a supply of appropriate reading materials. To do this each school was allocated £500 (Sterling) worth of books. The titles of books were selected by our Colombian colleagues and before the list for purchased was finalized it was checked with the schools and teachers to ensure it was optimal. The final list included a variety of fiction and non-fiction, with various genres of literature. Book purchases were made in Colombia (rather than in the U.K. and shipped out) to ensure value for money.

Form of paired reading

Although it was planned to use cross-age paired reading (grade 5 students tutoring grade 3 tutees), this was not possible. The Covid-19 outbreak meant that when the schools returned, each grade acted as a 'bubble'. A form of paired reading was used in which students with higher reading attainment became tutors to students of lower reading attainment within the same grade level. This form of paired reading was reported to be effective with previous studies reporting an effect size of +0.2 (Topping et al., 2012).

Primary outcome measures

Attainment in reading was determined using Dialect Assessment, a Spanish language reading test developed by Universidad de los Andes, Chile (UANDES). This is an adaptive computerized test that draws text from 40 passages of varying difficulty. It reported alpha of 0.97 when tested with a sample of 1186 Grade 3, 893 Grade 5, and 1531 Grade 8 students (MetaMetrics, 2015).

Ethics

The trial was approved by the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work Ethics Committee from Queen's University, Belfast, U.K., and from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Ethical Review Board, Colombia.

Effect of paired reading on reading attainment

Results of the dialect reading pre- and post-test are reported in Table 1. Missing data was less than 10%. Considering that the trial took place in the middle of the Covid pandemic, this was considered acceptable.

Condition	N Pre-reading score (SD)	N Post-reading score (SD)	Change
Control	N=127 534.57 (260.19)	N=120 539.37 (279.76)	+4.8
Intervention/ paired reading	N=171 618.12 (229.57)	N=155 659.95 (242.17)	+41.83
Total	N=298 582.51 (246.17)	N=275 607.34 (265.60)	

Table 1: Pre- and post-test attainment score in Spanish reading for control and paired reading groups

Gains for the intervention group over the control were +37.03 marks on the test. The *Effect Size* (as Cohen's *d*) was +0.16 (95% confidence intervals 0.004 to 0.322). Within condition t-tests

showed no significant gains in the control group (t(112)=-0.56, p=0.58). However, there was a significant gain within condition in the reciprocal reading arm of the trial (t(153)=-2.03, p<0.05). At this stage with the small sample researched it was not appropriate to compare gains between the paired reading group and the control group. Although the control group had lower pre-test scores than the intervention, we were not using post-test as the outcome (risking type I error). The design was not scaled to determine definitive causative effects, merely that the technique could be implemented in Colombian schools). The differences in pre-test scores demonstrate the great variability of student attainment in Colombian schools (even when drawn from similar socio-economic strata).

Discussion

Previous studies have reported that use of paired reading gave effect size gains for treatment over control groups of +0.24 for both tutors and tutees (Tymms *et al.,* 2011), and similarly +0.24 for students acting as tutors (Thurston, Cockerill & Chiang, 2021) to +0.45 for the bottom decile literacy students acting as tutors (Thurston *et al.,* 2019) in western European, English-speaking samples. It has also shown modest effect sizes at retention test of +0.18 (both tutors and tutees) in western Flemish-speaking samples (van Keer, 2004). This scientific study has established that these benefits may accrue in a similar way for a sample of elementary Latin American students with a high poverty background when reading in Spanish. While overall effect sizes on reading test scores were modest (overall ES +0.16), the intervention ran only for between 6–11 weeks across the four classes who implemented paired reading, which may not have been long enough for gains to maximize. This variability was due to the Covid-19 pandemic affecting school attendance and school opening/closures during the trial. In contrast, the Fife Peer Learning study in Scotland ran for a period of 104 weeks to produce effect sizes of +0.2 to +0.24 (Tymms *et al.*, 2011).

The benefits of the paired reading pedagogy may lie in the ability of peers to scaffold for peers. Peer learning, whilst helping the tutee to work within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is also likely to scaffold for their tutee, keeping them focused on the required behaviors and to 'concentrate on the difficult skills she is in the process of requiring' (Bruner, 1978, p. 19). This is an obvious advantage of many forms of cooperative learning and lies at the heart of social interdependence theory. The closely structured behaviors during paired reading encourage work in the ZPD, scaffolding, and promoting positive interaction.

Developing linguistic abilities also regulates cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1985; Wells, 1985). Bernstein's (1982) analysis provides convincing insight into the linkage between cognitive development and linguistic abilities. Examining the range and type of language structures employed by families and within schools, Bernstein classified codes as elaborated when language and discourse were rich. This language-rich approach to reading books facilitates children's development of an elaborated code that helps them undertake logical reasoning and decode the theoretical, and often abstract, concepts embedded within texts to which they are exposed in school. Students growing up in literacy poverty, where their language may not be stimulated to the same extent as children from more literate backgrounds and homes, may be afforded fewer opportunities to expand their ability to express abstract terms in verbal discourse, developing the required lexicon and comprehension to fully articulate with school-based texts (Bernstein, 1999). Using paired reading helps linguistic development within a sociocultural context. The importance of the tutor and tutee creating shared understanding through promotive positive interaction links back through theories of social interdependence (Johnson, Johnson & Roseth, 2010) to the original theories of Vygotsky (1985). Paired reading may provide the scaffolding required to facilitate these processes.

Conclusion

The paired reading technique shows promise as a cost-effective way to raise reading attainment in high poverty areas using Spanish language in Latin America. A book, chosen by students and not the teacher, provides a motivating and facilitating medium through which to base learning. Teachers found the technique easy to replicate and noted that students engaged enthusiastically with paired reading. Further work is now required to explore the use of the pedagogy in more detail, and to determine whether the techniques can be generalized to a larger population of students where valid comparisons can be made between the paired reading group and a suitably-sized control group.

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3

Grammar as choice, not grammar as compliance

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Abstract

Perhaps surprisingly to specialists in many countries of the world, the teaching of grammar has long occupied a somewhat uncertain position in the language curriculum, perhaps particularly in anglophone traditions, where in many countries grammar teaching was abandoned. The root of this uncertainty is twofold: firstly, that people interpret the term 'grammar' in different ways, and secondly, that there is little consensus about the purpose of grammar in the curriculum. Traditional grammar and traditional grammar teaching are concerned with teaching explicit knowledge of grammar rules, and advocating *compliance* to rules and notions of correctness, whereas much contemporary linguistics addresses the *choice* that language users make in different contexts. In this article, I will explore this contrast further, arguing for the educational benefits of conceptualizing grammar as choice and giving learners agency as writers.

Introduction

In some countries, the place of grammar in language teaching, be it in first language (L1), second language (L2), or Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) contexts, has been a particularly contested issue for over 50 years. In anglophone countries, for example, there was a widespread rejection of grammar teaching in the L1 curriculum in the 1960s and 1970s which has remained both pervasive and characterized by ideological positions. This rejection was based on a view, partially backed by research, that teaching grammar made no difference to the quality of learners' writing, but this was also widely contested (see for example, the overview by Myhill & Watson, 2014). In parallel, a similar debate has occurred in L2 and MFL (Ellis, 2012; Macaro & Masterman, 2006) with many countries shifting from a grammar–translation approach to a more communicative approach, with greater use of the target language and the expectation that grammar will be learned through encountering language in use rather than through direct teaching.

In an educational context, the word 'grammar' tends to be used in the singular, with an assumption that it is a discrete entity and that everyone knows what it is. But the field of linguistics is concerned with multiple grammars – generative grammar, transformational grammar, cognitive linguistics, construction grammar, systemic functional linguistics, and so on. One salient problem with the educational debates about grammar teaching is that very often they are founded on different conceptions of what grammar is and what grammar does. In particular, there is a tendency to muddle 'traditional grammar' and more contemporary views of grammar. According to Nordquist (2020), 'the term traditional grammar refers to the collection of prescriptive rules and concepts about the structure of language that is commonly taught in schools' and is 'largely based on the principles of Latin grammar, not on modern linguistic research in English'. Traditional grammar and traditional grammar teaching are concerned with *compliance* to rules and notions of correctness, whereas much contemporary linguistics addresses the *choice* that language users make in different contexts. In this article, I will explore this contrast further, arguing for the educational benefits of conceptualizing grammar as choice. This relates principally to L1 teaching, though there are considerable points of overlap with L2 teaching.

Contemporary global perspectives: different theories and pedagogies of grammar

What is clear from research and professional insights is that in different countries, grammar teaching not only differs in how it is addressed and what learning purpose it serves, but it also continues to raise uncertainty in terms of its educational usefulness. Boivin et al.'s (2018) review of grammar teaching across anglophone, francophone, Hispanic and German-speaking countries highlights ongoing debates and concerns about the value of grammar, particularly in relation to any benefit in terms of writing outcomes. Investigating grammar teaching in Danish L1 and MFL classrooms, Kabel et al. (2022) found that traditional grammar remains the dominant approach, and from a Finnish perspective, Rättyä et al. (2019) note that the 'underlying controversy' about whether to teach grammar or not remains, particularly in relation to any direct effect on language proficiency. In the United States, Denham (2020) reports that 'grammar' is still seen as a negative word, and she argues for the use of the word 'linguistics' instead, broadening thinking away from rule-based grammar towards an empowering understanding of grammar concepts and how language functions in society. There is less research on grammar teaching in the L1 classroom in African and Asian countries, though a significant body of research has explored grammar teaching in English as an L2. This is interesting of itself, flagging the need for a raising of interest around the teaching of non-Western L1 languages. My own experience of supervising many doctoral students from the Middle East and Asia is that many countries teach a very traditional school grammar, focused on grammatical forms, rules and correctness, even when national policy is pointing towards a more student-centered and functionally-oriented approach. From an L1 Arabic perspective, Taha-Thomure (2008) found that 'most resources available are grammar-based, teacher-centered materials that do not help the teachers to teach Arabic

in a communicative, research based, student-centered and differentiated way' (p. 4).

What is interesting, however, is that despite this ongoing uncertainty about the role of grammar teaching, and variation in how it is taught in different countries, there appears to be an international surge of interest in grammar teaching that is less preoccupied with polarized debates about whether grammar should or should not be taught, and more concerned with researching students' learning and understanding. In particular, this research seems to be moving the debate beyond rules and compliance to the benefits of thinking about, reflecting on, and engaging with language. Wijnands et al. (2021) argue for the importance of fostering higher-order cognitive thinking about language and grammar in real-world contexts rather than normative teaching of grammar. Similarly, others link this higher order thinking to metalinguistic understanding of language in use (Derewianka, 2013; Myhill & Newman, 2019). Such shifts in how we think about grammar have consequences for the pedagogies adopted, and for the nature of both learner activity and teacher intervention. Both Fontich et al. (2020) and Rättyä et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of mediation by the teacher between what is taught and what is learned, and Rättyä et al. ask 'if the distance between both grammar knowledge and language use is to be covered via pedagogic mediation, … [what] would be the "whats" and the "hows" of such mediation?' (2019, p. 1). At the same time, in both L1 and L2 teaching, there is significant advocacy of systemic functional linguistics as the basis for grammar pedagogy because it makes connections between the grammatical form and how it functions to create meaning in specific texts and contexts.

A plurilingual world

This article primarily addresses L1 teaching of grammar, but already I have noted some similarities across L1 and L2 in terms of how grammar is discussed and researched. The distinction between an

L1 learner and an L2 learner is not as clear as the two terms might suggest and may not be helpful when thinking about teaching grammar. As part of an international research project investigating language learning, I recently interviewed students in schools in England about their language backgrounds and practices, which clearly highlighted many multilingual practices. One student spoke Turkish at home with her parents, but English with her siblings; another spoke English at home but all the family switched to Urdu to communicate with the grandmother; yet another spoke Arabic, Somali, and Italian at home. Another newly-arrived student spoke Cantonese at home, understood Mandarin, had been taught in an English as the medium of instruction school, and since arriving in England had started to learn French in his own time using *Duolingo*. These examples all blur the line between what is the L1 and L2 in a manner that is the everyday reality for many learners around the world: in a multilingual world, many learners are plurilingual.

From a pedagogical perspective, this matters. Whilst it might seem self-evident that a learner who is not fluent in a language might need to learn particular grammatical constructions more overtly or explicitly than a learner who has heard that language from birth, in practice learners' needs are much more diverse and complex. Language learners need to know more than a grammatical construction – they need to when and how to use it. For example, academic writing is often a challenging genre (or super-genre?) to master for L1 writers as well as for writers from other language backgrounds. My argument is that effective grammar teaching needs to meet learners' needs and it is this which should be at the forefront when planning teaching in order to accommodate the diversity of learners in plurilingual classrooms.

Making the case for grammar as choice

The distinction, noted earlier, between traditional grammar and modern grammar largely revolves around the difference between prescriptive and descriptive pedagogies. Prescriptive grammar leads towards classroom practices that emphasize the learning of rules, many of which are rules of usage (such as 'You should not split an infinitive in English'), rather than rules of grammar. The goal of such teaching is accuracy in language production. This is not to suggest that accuracy is not important – but it is only one aspect of successful written communication. Many texts which are 100% accurate are also poorly written and a reminder that accuracy is necessary in good writing, but not sufficient. In the context of teaching writing, a prescriptive pedagogy includes suggesting rules or norms for particular texts, or for what constitutes good writing. It tends to foreground lower order writing skills, such as transcription, spelling, and punctuation, but rarely addresses the higher order skills of writing, which are of critical importance in the teaching of L1.

In contrast, a descriptive pedagogy is more concerned with developing student understanding of *how* language is used in different contexts and *how* meaning is made. The goal of this teaching is to open up and expand students' knowledge about language in order to enable them to make independent and autonomous choices in their own writing. An illustration of this contrast is offered below:

Prescriptive approach	You should never start a sentence with 'and' or 'but'
Descriptive approach	Sometimes it is very effective to start a sentence with 'and' or 'but' if it is for a purpose.

A pedagogy that aims to foster a recognition of the impact of grammatical choice would take this further by exploring the use of sentence-initial 'and' or 'but' in a more nuanced way. This might include investigating the difference between two sentences where 'and' or 'but' would join the two sentences effectively, and two sentences where the sentence-initial 'and' or 'but' add emphasis to what follows, or a changed rhythm, or a conversational tone. This kind of pedagogical attention to grammar is much more appropriately attuned to the higher order skills of writing, and how

texts are crafted and shaped for communicative and rhetorical effect.

This notion of grammar as choice is underpinned by the work of Halliday et al. and their emphasis on 'grammar as a meaning-making resource' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 10). Halliday (1975) argued that developing as a language user is a process of 'learning how to mean' and emphasized the fundamental relationship between grammar, context, and meaning. For Halliday, choice resonates throughout the composing process – be that at word level, at syntactical, clause, or sentence level; or at the level of textual organization through cohesion, coherence, and text structure – because grammar is 'a network of inter-related meaningful choices' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 49). Halliday's work represents a major contribution to functional linguistics, but unusually also to grammar pedagogy because of the substantial uptake of Systemic Functional Linguistics in educational settings (see for example, Macken-Horarik et al., 2011; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014; Derewianka & Jones, 2016). However, the notion of grammar as choice is not unique to Halliday. Carter and McCarthy (2006) made a helpful distinction between grammar as a *system,* where the interest lies in identifying the forms of the grammatical system and how they operate, in contrast to grammar as *choice,* which considers the impact of grammatical choices on meaning: 'every choice carries a different meaning, and grammar is concerned with the implications of such choices' (2006, p. 4). From a cognitive rather than a linguistic perspective, Kellogg reminds us that 'all writers must make decisions about their texts' (2008, p. 2), and this is borne out by writer Joan Didion's testimony of the importance of grammatical choices in shaping meaning:

> Grammar is a piano I play by ear, since I seem to have been out of school the year the rules were mentioned. All I know about grammar is its infinite power. To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed. Many people know about camera angles now, but not so many know about sentences. The arrangement of the words matters, and the arrangement you want can be found in the picture in your mind. The picture dictates the arrangement. The picture dictates whether this will be a sentence with or without clauses, a sentence that ends hard or a dying-fall sentence, long or short, active or passive. The picture tells you how to arrange the words and the arrangement of the words tells you, or tells me, what's going on in the picture. *Nota bene*:
>
> It tells you.
>
> You don't tell it.
>
> Joan Didion (1976)

This way of thinking is a far cry from a prescriptive view of grammar with its emphasis on compliance with deterministic rules, and has critically important implications for the teaching of grammar. It opens up the possibility of grammar as a useful tool for teaching about writing and being a writer, and for developing understanding of writerly decision-making.

Grammar as choice: A pedagogy for teaching writing

As Kellogg (2008) observed, writing is always about making decisions. Many of these decisions are not about grammar: for example, writers make decisions about titles; about what content to exclude or include; about visual layout, such as font style and size, or the use of images or diagrams; and about forms of publication, such as digital or print. But alongside this, choices about grammar are inextricably intertwined with the expression of meaning, and the more writers can understand the impact of the choices they make, the more they are empowered as agentic and independent writers.

Of course, a substantial proportion of decision-making in writing is either internalized or implicit decision-making. Punctuation

is a good example of *internalized* decision-making. Very young writers have to consciously think about using capital letters and full stops to demarcate sentences, and later about the use of internal sentence punctuation. But mature writers, having mastered the use of punctuation, will insert punctuation marks largely without thinking. Nonetheless, even for mature writers, there are times when that decision-making becomes overt. In the previous paragraph, I listed a range of writing decisions that are not grammar-related. The first version of this sentence used only commas to separate the list items, but I altered it using a colon to break the sentence, followed by semi-colons to separate the list of items, because I felt it made it clearer, removing the uncertainty about whether a comma was separating a listed item or internal to the list. Similarly, *implicit* decision-making draws on the vast store of grammatical knowledge that L1 and plurilingual speakers possess about their language/s. Small children who make the mistake of adding -ed to an irregular verb in English (e.g., *I goed*) may be making an error, but they are also showing their knowledge that many verbs in English form the past tense with the -ed morpheme. But they could not articulate this – it is implicit. It would actually be impossible to speak or write without this substantial store of implicit grammatical knowledge.

However, from a teaching perspective, grammar as choice develops *explicit* knowledge that is particularly relevant to learners' needs as writers, and which is primarily concerned with understanding how a particular grammatical choice can subtly alter how the text is read, rather than with the accuracy of the form. It might be helpful to explore this by looking at two examples, one for lower primary children (5–7 year olds) and one for upper primary children (9–11 year olds). This will also illustrate how teaching is adapted to meet learners' needs and age-related interests – the teaching of grammar as choice has a role to play at every age and stage of learning development.

The first example, for children aged 5–7, shows how attention to grammar can be helpful for young writers at a very early stage in their writing development, before they can necessarily grasp the grammatical concepts. The class have shared the reading of Julia Donaldson's well-known book, *The Gruffalo*, enjoying joining in together with the many repeated phrases, such as 'There's no such thing as a Gruffalo!' The teacher then asks the children to play a game, in groups, matching the storybook characters to the homes they describe, with some extra possibilities included:

Snake: 'in my logpile house'
Owl: 'in my treetop house'
Fox: 'in my underground house'
Extras: 'in my mudhole house'; 'in my prickle-bush house'

Together, as a class, they create a list of other woodland animals who are not in the story (e.g., mole, bear, bat, frog) and devise prepositional phrases to describe homes for these animals (e.g., a frog – 'on my lilypad house'). The teacher then draws out from the story the prepositional phrases which describe where the animals met ('by these rocks', 'by this lake') and together they create some further options (e.g., 'beside the stream', 'under the tree', 'in the glade'). Finally, the class chooses one of the animals they listed, and collaboratively, as a whole class led by the teacher, they create a new section for the story, following Julia Donaldson's structure, and using their prepositional phrases to describe the animal's house and where they meet. This activity encourages a playful experimentation with language, whilst at the same time focusing on the way prepositional phrases can be a useful language resource for describing places in narrative. Attention is directed explicitly towards the prepositional phrases, though the teacher may or may not use the grammatical term itself.

The second example, for upper primary children, also addresses narrative writing but with a focus on developing characterization. The children are writing their own stories, thinking about how to convey character. They have read together Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom,* a story where the sea throws a boy onto a desert island where he forms a friendship with its only inhabitant,

Kensuke. In one lesson, in order to focus on how detailed noun phrases can evoke strong visual images of a character, the class revisit the extract they read earlier, when the boy (and the reader) meet the eponymous character, Kensuke, for the first time:

> He was diminutive, no taller than me, and as old a man as I had ever seen. He wore nothing but a pair of tattered breeches bunched at the waist, and there was a large knife in his belt. He was thin, too. In places – under his arms, round his neck and his midriff – his copper brown skin lay in folds about him, almost as if he'd shrunk inside it. What little hair he had on his head and his chin was long and wispy and white.

Morpurgo's description of Kensuke is replete with visual detail, achieved principally through the noun phrases. There are expanded noun phrases, such as 'a pair of tattered breeches bunched at the waist' and 'a large knife in his belt', where the expansion provides precise visual detail. Consider the difference between Morpurgo's sentence and a reduced version – 'He wore nothing but breeches and had a knife' – both in terms of the visual detail but also the inferences implied by the *tattered* breeches and a *large* knife. There is also a sequence of short noun phrases that refer to the body (waist, arms, neck, etc.), which give a very corporeal image of the man. In addition, there are freestanding adjectives (such as diminutive, wispy, etc.), which offer further visual detail and are prominent because they are freestanding. Making explicit and discussing the way the noun phrases and the freestanding adjectives here contribute to the characterization by providing a strong visual image of Kensuke enables developing writers to extend their understanding of how they can create character in their own narratives, and allows more mature writers to recognize the connection between visual detail and inference. This is not the only way to create character, of course, such as through dialogue, or through showing action in verb choices and so on. But a close focus on one possible strategy develops a writer's repertoire for creating character and is a salient reminder that meaning-making is not achieved through

Principle	Explanation (What)	Rationale (Why)
Links	Make a link between the grammar being introduced and how it works in the writing being taught	To establish a purposeful learning reason for addressing grammar, and connect grammar with meaning and rhetorical effect
Examples	Explain the grammar through examples, not lengthy explanations	To avoid writing lessons becoming mini-grammar lessons, and to allow access to the structure even if the grammar concept is not fully understood metalinguistically
Authentic Texts	Use authentic texts as models to link writers to a broader community of writers	To integrate reading and writing and show how 'real' writers make language choices
Discussion	Build in dialogic metalinguistic discussion about grammar and its effects	To promote deep metalinguistic learning about why a particular choice works, and to develop independence rather than compliance

● **Table 1**. The LEAD Principles

a checklist of techniques but through an understanding of the repertoire of choices.

As a consequence of a succession of research studies exploring the teaching of grammar as choice, we have developed a set of pedagogic principles (the LEAD principles) to support teachers in integrating this kind of attention to grammar into their teaching of writing.

These principles guide teachers in both planning and teaching, emphasizing the importance of making connections between a grammar point and how it functions in a particular text. The principles also signal the role of discussion, talking about language choices in texts, as a key tool for promoting

metalinguistic understanding about choice in written texts. Using these principles, a possible sequence of learning drawing on the *Kensuke's Kingdom* text above might be realized as set out below.

A Sequence of Learning addressing visual detail as part of characterization.

Introduction: The class share the re-reading of the description of Kensuke and discuss their responses and impressions of Kensuke.

Whole class: The teacher invites students to close their eyes and visualize Kensuke, imagining what he looks like, and then asks them to read the text and underline the specific phrases which helped their visualizations.

The teacher displays the extract, with the descriptive noun phrases highlighted in color (*Examples*), and they discuss together the images they evoke. The teacher points out that it is the noun phrases that create the images (*Link*).

In groups: Students play with re-writing one or two of the noun phrases to create a different visual description of Kensuke, which alters his characterization.

Whole class: The teacher leads whole class talk about what we infer as readers about this character and which particular noun phrase choices trigger those inferences (*Discussion*). S/he notes how the noun phrases are central to creating these visualizations and inferences for readers (e.g., *a pair of tattered breeches, bunched at the waist*).

Individual: The students revisit their own earlier work on a character in their own stories. The teacher asks students to visualize their own character, then to write a paragraph of description, thinking especially about how their choice of noun phrases enable the reader to visualize and infer.

Plenary: One or two students share their own character description with the whole class and explain to their peers how one of their noun phrases generates visual and inferential information (*Link*).

Thus far, the examples of teaching with a grammar as choice approach have looked at particular word classes (personal pronouns and noun phrases) where grammar and lexis strongly inter-relate. But grammar functions at multiple levels, including beyond the word or word class, and so teaching should reflect this. One aspect of writing with which learners, from the primary school through to doctoral thesis writing, seem less assured is how sentences can be shaped to complement the meaning. This can occur both internally within sentences, and across a range of sentences, and as Joan Didion, quoted earlier, recognized, altering the structure of the sentence shifts the meaning it conveys. The examples below suggest how teaching might draw attention to within-sentence structure and how the choices can subtly alter how meaning is evoked.

- *With the suitcase in one hand and the trumpet in the other, he dashed out of the cave. Taking infinite care, the BFG unscrewed the top of the glass jar...* (Roald Dahl, *The BFG*)
  Fronted adverbials: reflect on how the focus in these two sentences alters if the initial adverbial is moved to elsewhere in the sentence. The choice to position the adverbials at the start foregrounds what the BFG is carrying, and how he unscrews the jar, rather than being driven by the action.

- *Holding his breath, so that his whole body was still,*
  he drew the clasp slowly, slowly, out of the thinning white hair.
  (William Nicholson, *The Wind-Singer*)
  Repetition: the repetition of the word 'slowly' at this very tense moment in the story mirrors the carefulness of the action to remove the clasp and intensify the tension.

Equally important to writing is patterning across sentences, within a paragraph or sometimes across a whole text. In England, students are often taught that they should vary their sentences but it is much less common for students to understand *why* sentence variety is important. Gary Provost's oft-quoted advice on sentence structure remains a highly effective demonstration of the power of sentence patterning, often strongly linked to the rhythm of the text.

> This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.
>
> Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals–sounds that say listen to this, it is important.
>
> So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't just write words. Write music.
>
> Gary Provost (2019)

Mature readers pick up the rhythm of text while reading silently, but less assured readers may not – reading aloud and hearing text read aloud can significantly help this recognition of rhythm and patterning, and can help writers become the readers of their own text. Try reading Gary Provost's text aloud, and then read aloud the two examples below, which might be used in teaching students in secondary school (aged 12+):

> A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.
>
> (Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*)

There is much to say about these three sentences! Firstly, notice the increasing length of these sentences: at this point in the novel, the young Pip is being approached by the escaped convict, Magwitch, and one could argue that the growing length of the sentences reflects Pip's growing sense of the man he is looking at. A teacher might discuss the fact that the three sentences are all minor sentences with no main clause, and why this might be. Or a teacher might discuss why Dickens uses passive voice and active voice in the last sentence.

> So here I stand, one girl among many.
> I speak not for myself, but for all girls and boys.
> I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.
> Those who have fought for their rights:
> Their right to live in peace.
> Their right to be treated with dignity.
> Their right to equality of opportunity.
> Their right to be educated.
>
> (from Malala Yousafzai's speech to the United Nations)

As a persuasive speech, this draws on many of the characteristics of ancient Greek rhetoric, which itself uses many techniques of sentence patterning. Here, a teacher could prompt discussion about the pattern of the first three sentences, each longer than the one before, but with the same pattern of focusing on the 'I' in the first part, then others in the second. A teacher might also explore the effect of the anaphora[1] in the later sentences with the repetition of 'their right'.

It's interesting to note that Gary Provost likens varying the length of sentences to making music, whereas Joan Didion likened writing to photography – one is aural, the other visual. It is a helpful reminder that considering the grammatical choices in a text is fundamentally about crafting and shaping text with the creative attention of a musician or a photographer. Writing is not just about words, or about grammatical correctness, it is about developing the eye and the ear of the creative artist.

Conclusion

One problem when writing an article such as this one, which requires the use of examples to illustrate the points made, is that inevitably the examples imply age ranges for which they might be appropriate and a cultural context for which they might be appropriate. Yet two key messages permeate this article: match the grammar focus with the writers' learning needs and use authentic texts that reflect actual language use in that language community. What is constant across age ranges and textual choices is that the goal of grammar teaching represented here is to help writers understand how 'to make choices from among a range of linguistic resources, and to be aware of the effects of different choices on the rhetorical power of their writing' (Lefstein, 2009, p. 382). This kind of teaching fosters metalinguistic understanding of writing – the capacity to reflect on language in written texts and

to monitor their own use of language in writing. It is not so much interested in grammatical form, but in the function of grammar in a context: less interested in *what*, and more interested in *how* and *why*. Crucially, it addresses the essence of what it means to be an effective writer who understands the infinite possibilities of language for rich communication, rather than a writer who can only achieve the lower order skills of accuracy with much more limited communicative proficiency.

The LEAD principles signal the importance of dialogic metalinguistic talk, and our research suggests that it is the rich, open-ended discussion about the relationship between a choice and its communicative impact in a text that helps learners transfer what they are learning into their own writing repertoires. In many countries around the world, writing is taught in terms of things that writers should do or should include. Here in England, students are often given checklists to remind them what should be in their text, but with relatively little attention given to why those choices might be appropriate, and when not. It is a model of compliance to predetermined norms, rather than genuine teaching about writing and being a writer. Creating repeated opportunities for metalinguistic discussion, which opens up thinking about possibilities for language choices, rather than narrowing it down to a fixed set of expectations, is empowering and enabling. It positions learners as thinkers, capable of their own decision-making as writers, and able to explain and justify those decisions. This is a very different way to think about grammar, one which sees that grammar and creativity as a writer are intrinsically inter-related, rather than diametrically opposed, and one where grammar has a genuine learning purpose. Or, as Crystal puts it, 'The educational aim today is to place grammar within a frame of reference which demonstrates its relevance to the active and creative tasks of language production and comprehension' (2004, p. 10).

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1   Anaphora is a term from Greek rhetoric referring to the repetition of words, phrases or sentences for rhetorical effect.

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4

The burden of textbooks: Language socialization in India and Wales

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Abstract

This paper investigates the process of language socialization within the context of language education, with a regional focus on India and Wales. The two regions are compared through the lens of 'postcolonial shame' that is associated with learning mother tongues. Material in Hindi-language teaching textbooks and a Welsh-language reading series is analyzed for their possible impact on language attitudes amongst the youth towards the languages they speak. Educational institutions are a crucial site wherein students develop their social and emotional responses to language learning, and this paper addresses these issues in detail by comparing two sets of language-teaching materials and the burden of language socialization placed on them.

Introduction

Linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir called language a 'great force of socialization, probably the greatest that exists' (1933). It is through language that students start to learn about the world they inhabit, and comprehend social cues and contexts (Ochs and Schieffelin, 2011). Be they ideas about the self, society, or the nation, they are primarily formed through an understanding of language. Education is crucial to shaping the students' identity, emotions, and social attitudes, especially in their primary years, and language education in schools is even more central to this relationship. This paper looks at the burden of language textbooks within the school system. What is their role in socializing students into socio-cultural norms, beyond language? How do different postcolonial nations navigate these decisions while teaching language in school? How much burden of language socialization should these textbooks bear, if any?

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued in *Decolonising the Mind* (1987) that teaching students in the colonizer's language at school makes learning a cerebral experience for them, creating a dissonance with their emotionally-felt linguistic experience in the home. My argument in this paper is that while it is important to teach the mother tongue in school, attention also needs to be paid to the selection of material for a mother tongue textbook, for a more enhanced social and emotional learning (SEL) experience in the classroom and to avoid alienating students from their language. Different strategies can be employed by curriculum developers to this effect, and this paper analyzes some strategies of socialization through language textbooks and materials from India and Wales, both nations that have faced linguistic oppression from their colonizer's language – English.

The theoretical underpinnings of this paper come from the discipline of sociolinguistics, primarily focusing on the theory of 'language socialization'. Ochs and Schieffelin (2011) have explained the concept by stating that young people are socialized simultaneously 'into and through' language at school. A language is deeply rooted in the culture it belongs to, and language learning inevitably opens up the window to understanding the cultural universe of that language. In fact, textbooks have been described as an 'arena of struggle' (Pradhan 2020), wherein knowledge is produced, created, and reinforced. Textbooks are created through a set of national policies and curricular frameworks, and hence the process of creating textbooks is also inherently political in

nature. This means that textbooks become a space where political ideologies can be both reinforced or challenged. Education systems have been called 'key channels to manufacturing national identity and citizenship' (Mohammad-Arif, 2005), especially when it comes to history textbooks that change in India and Pakistan with every new government in order to alter the course of history to suit political agendas.

In his research on language learning in North India and Pakistan, Tariq Rahman claims that studying language textbooks is even more important than studying history or social science textbooks because language not only reflects but also 'reinforces' values; it is language that allows ideas and sensations to form a shape and definition: 'School language teaching textbooks, therefore, help in constructing social reality for students' (Rahman, 2002, 64). Language textbooks not only reinforce *language* ideologies, but also propagate cultural ideas about ethical, moral or patriotic values. Should the responsibility for inducting students into becoming better citizens of the family, society, and nation lie with language textbooks? And if not, is it possible to avoid it and focus solely on language teaching for the sake of language?

The methodology employed in this paper is a document analysis of language textbooks and teaching resources from India and Wales. The analyses will focus on language-in-education policies, the role of multilingualism in national policies, the focus on language pedagogy in national curricular frameworks, the structure of language textbooks, the political context behind their creation, the themes they cover, the questions that follow every chapter or text, the visual layout of the texts, and their engagement with the socio-political world beyond language. The aim is to understand the process of language socialization that takes place through the material in these textbooks and materials, which is turn impacted by the country's national policies on language and education. In this sense then, the role of textbooks and other learning materials becomes extremely crucial while looking at attaining SDG target 4.7, regarding promoting education for sustainable development,

'human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' (The Global Goals, 2015).

The Indian textbooks selected for analysis are Hindi textbooks for grades 5–8. The upper primary years in school are crucial in shaping students' ideas about language and about the world through language. The following section will look at the postcolonial linguistic contexts of India and Wales, followed by an analysis of the textbooks in Hindi and the readers in Welsh, with a conclusion that seeks to understand different processes of language socialization taking place in schools in diverse cultures. The paper acknowledges that the cultural and socio-economic contexts of the Hindi and Welsh materials are quite disparate, given that we are looking at national textbooks in an LMIC setting and a reading scheme in a high-income setting, but the next section explains why the question of language politics is comparable in these two contexts, despite the economic differences and state of education in the two nations.

Postcolonial politics of language

In 1909, MK Gandhi remarked, 'Mr Lloyd George is taking steps to ensure that Welsh children do not forget their language. How much more need is there for Indians to preserve their language than for the Welsh to preserve theirs, and how much more keen should we be?' (BBC News, 2017). This quote brings together the threat faced by Indian and Welsh languages by a common colonizer, and the oppression that these languages were subjected to by creating a language hierarchy in which English was given a superior status. As a result, there arose a similar sense of 'postcolonial shame' (Bewes, 2011) attached to learning both languages, since an official and structural hierarchy was created between these languages through education policy. This section explains why this paper compares India and Wales in

particular, given their deep historical connections and similar language politics.

Linguistic connections between India and Wales go back to the 1800s, when the Welsh missionary Thomas Jones wrote down the Khasi language for the first time and provided the spoken language with a script (Ibankyntiew, 2021). In terms of education, India's 1835 Minute of Education, created by Thomas Macaulay, stated that English must be taught to every Indian for the purposes of 'intellectual improvement'. Macaulay went on to declare that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia' (1835 Minute of Education). Similarly, the 1870 Education Act in England and Wales ensured that English-medium education was established as superior to Welsh-medium education and stated that 'because of their language, the mass of the Welsh people are inferior to the English in every branch of practical knowledge and skill' (Edwards, 1993). In both cases, the argument against the Welsh language in Wales, and Sanskrit and Arabic languages in India, was that they did not contain 'practical' or 'scientific' information and that the people's intellectual development and enrichment was impossible without learning English.

These structural changes led to an internalization of language hierarchies over the years and gave birth to a generational trauma attached to learning 'native' languages in these regions. In fact, some of these ideologies translated to the classroom where children were shamed for speaking their 'mother tongue'. Practices like the 'Welsh Not' in Wales, where students were made to hang a piece of wood around their neck if they were 'caught' speaking in Welsh, ensured that the shame and humiliation attached to the language continued. It was a direct result of these policies that the percentage of Welsh speakers in the country fell from 54% in 1891 to 18% in 1981 (Edwards, 1993). In many Indian schools too, practices that punish or fine or parade around students who are 'caught' speaking their mother tongue on school grounds continue to this day. These practices only reinforce cultural and linguistic hierarchies and perpetuate the same language ideologies amongst a new generation of students.

Given this context of postcolonial language politics in both India and Wales, the paper aims to compare the language-teaching materials from the two regions to analyze their focus in language teaching – do the materials focus on language teaching, or much more? How does this affect the social and emotional relationship of a new generation of learners to their 'mother tongues'?

Case study I: Hindi-language textbooks

In 2020, India's Education Policy was revised for the third time since Independence (NEP, 2020). Among other things, the new policy puts a strong focus on the power of multilingualism in the classroom and encourages 'mother tongue education' in schools until Class V and even beyond, 'wherever possible' (13). The policy also emphasizes the 'preservation and promotion of India's cultural wealth' (53), and this focus on mother tongue education is a part of this project. It even recommends a project for schools called 'Languages of India', where students learn greetings from languages across different states of India – a testimony to the 'unity in diversity' that exists in the nation.

The textbooks in focus in this section are created by the NCERT[1] (the national board) and Karnataka Board (the state board) for Classes V–VIII. The textbooks were revised after the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), released in 2005, and have been through multiple revisions until 2021. The most recent NCF was published in 2022 with a focus on foundational stage education, but has not yet been implemented in textbooks. The framework states that a child should not be discouraged from speaking or made to feel ashamed about speaking their home language (77). Echoing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, it also mentions that 'children who study through their mother tongue or a home or familiar language perform better in other subjects such as Mathematics and Science compared with

1   National Council for Educational Research and Training

their peers who are taught through an unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction' (74). This directly references an impact on social and emotional connections built by the students with their language, based on how they are taught the language in school.

Moving our focus to language textbooks, the 'unity in diversity' concept is explored in detail across these textbooks in Hindi. The textbooks contain stories, poems, folk tales, dramas, interviews, and represent diverse cultures, religions, languages and dialects, states, and socio-economic backgrounds. This links back to the idea of 'preserving and promoting India's cultural wealth' from the 2020 NEP.

The first section of the Class V Hindi textbook *Rimjhim* is titled *Apni apni rangatein* (Each with its own colours). One of the chapters in this section is titled *Phaslon ka tyohaar* (The festival of harvest) and talks about the different ways in which the harvest festival is celebrated across diverse states in India. For instance, it is called *pongal* in Tamil Nadu and people say *pongala-pongal, pongala-pongal* when the main rice dish is ready. In Gujarat, it is celebrated as *Makar-Sankranti* with a kite-flying tradition. In the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, the festival is celebrated as *Ghughutiya*, and children bead necklaces of grains and feed them to birds singing:

> *Kawwa Aao*
> *Ghughoot Aao*
> *Le Kawwa Badau*
> *Ma Kai De Jaa Sone Ka Ghadau*
> *Kha Lai Poori*
> *Ma Kai De Jaa Sone Di Chhoori*

> Crow, come
> Sweetmeat, come
> Here, crow, take the pitcher
> And in return, give me a pot full of gold
> Eat the flatbread
> In return, give me a golden knife

Another chapter within this section is a short story written by one of the best-known Hindi and Urdu writers, Premchand, on the festival of Eid. This once again fits into the trope of 'unity in diversity', which is promoted throughout the textbook. Another recurrent theme across textbooks is instilling patriotism through historical figures of freedom fighters from the time of Indian Independence. One of the chapters in the Class VI textbook is the famous poem *Jhansi ki rani* (The Queen of Jhansi) by Subhadrakumari Chauhan, a popular children's writer from the 20th century. This poem is based on a freedom fighter called Rani Laxmibai, who fought in India's first war of independence in 1857 and became a symbol of independence:

> *Khoob ladi mardaani woh toh*
> *Jhaansi wali rani thi*

> She fought hard like a man
> She was the Queen of Jhansi

These two lines are a part of the refrain of the poem, and anecdotally remain the most memorable part of the poem for children, even if they do not remember the rest of the poem. Apart from this, there are chapters on MK Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, along with poems that invoke the idea of the independent nation. As a sequel to the Chauhan poem, the Class VII textbook *Vasant* contains a chapter on Veer Kunwar Singh, a military leader and commander during the first war of Independence in India in 1857. He is mentioned in the *Jhansi ki rani* poem (quoted above), and this chapter explores his life story and how he became the patriot who contributed to the war. The following lines are taken from a Bhojpuri poem by Manoranjan Prasad Singh in praise of Singh:

> *Chala gaya yon Kunwar Amar Singh, saahas se sab aridal jeet,*
> *Uska chitra dekhkar ab bhi, dushman hote hain bhaybheet.*

> There goes Kunwar Amar Singh, winning over opponents with courage
> Looking at his picture even today, the enemy is filled with fear.

Another important set of chapters are based on ethical, social and moral values, and encourage children to learn 'good' behavior. For instance, see the following poem *Hey bhagwaan* (Dear God) from the Class V Karnataka Board Hindi textbook, *Suman*:

Hey Bhagwaan, do vardaan
Padh likhkar hum banein mahaan
Maata pita ki aagya maane
Karein sada hum achhe kaam

Dear God, give us your blessing
So we can study hard and achieve greatness
May we listen to our parents
And always do the right thing

I believe that the rhymes in both the poems demonstrated above make them appealing but at the same time, strongly associate the process of language learning with learning ideas about the nation as well as learning the 'ideal' behavior of children within society. There is a similar sense of moral and value education in the *Kabir ki saakhiyaan* (Poems by Kabir) chapter in the Class VIII Hindi Textbook by CBSE, *Vasant*. The genre of the couplets written by Kabir, the 15th century saint and Bhakti poet, is known as *Saakhi*, derived from the Sanskrit word *saakshi*, which means witness, and are meant to be evidencing the Truth. They have been written in the Hindi spoken at the time, which would be a combination of Sanskrit, Braj, Avadhi and Bhojpuri, as we know them today. This is demonstrated with an example of a *saakhi* below, which may not be as relatable for students today in terms of its language:

Aavat gaari ek hai, ultat hoi anek.
Keh Kabir nahin ulatiye, vahi ek ki ek

If someone abuses once, the response is multiple curses
Kabir says don't retaliate, or it will be a never-ending war of words

We will now examine Welsh language readers and their themes before comparing the two approaches to language teaching.

Case study II: Welsh-language readers

Education policy and language-teaching strategies in Wales are extremely different to those in India. Textbooks, for instance, are not centralized for every grade in school, and learners are placed on a language continuum depending on their language attainment. As a result, a child in year (grade) 6 at school may be at Level 1 or Level 8 in their Welsh language reading books, depending on their individual progress. These capacities are determined by a government document that describes 'key stages' of development in students, and which separates the reading, writing and speaking strands of language and assesses each learner based on their age and attainment in the language.

The set of books analyzed in this section is entitled *Coeden Darllen Rhydychen* (*Oxford Reading Tree*), available on the Welsh government website and used by teachers in the classroom. This series of e-books is published by Oxford University Press (OUP) and used in different languages in over 100 countries (Oxford Owl). The OUP website explains which level is suited to which grades in schools, across 20 levels of readers. Each level has specific goals: for instance, the Level 5 books teach children to use alternative spellings for sounds in words, such as *ou* for 'ow' and 'oo' (Oxford Owl). The aim of the books is to support the Cambridge Primary curriculum framework, teach and practice phonetics in the language and provide a bridge for children to transition from phonics to richer reading materials through interesting characters and stories.

These standardized Oxford Reading Tree books have been adapted to the Welsh language as *Coeden Darllen Rhydychen* and are used by teachers in the classroom. There are no standardized textbooks like in the Indian contexts. This arguably makes it much easier to address SEL and SDG target 4.7 as the texts are located within the genre of children's literature instead of in the form of

a textbook. The themes in these texts surround daily objects and events like birthday parties, pets, and family gatherings, as well as fantasy stories around magic keys, pirates, and dragons. There is very little engagement with the socio-political environment in Wales. There is also a huge focus on the visual appeal of the text, with very few words on each page. There are no questions at the end of every chapter.

The Level 5 books contain 12 stories, which revolve around a magic key, adventures with pirates, a dragon tree, adventures in the castle, a village in the snow, a grandmother, an underground adventure, and so on. The stories usually follow the protagonists, a young boy called Dids, his sister Cad, and their family and friends, and are about daily life events for the family or fantasy adventures for the children. The remaining stories have a protagonist called Onw (pronounced *oh-nouh*), who also has adventures. While the dragon trope sets the stories within the Welsh cultural context, along with the names of the characters, there are no other signs that point to the socio-cultural context of the stories. Another feature of this book, as noted above, is that the stories have been written with extremely sparse text – no more than 10–15 words per page, in large font, following the illustration. For instance, one entire page of the Level 5 story *Yr allwedd hud* (The Magic Key) has the following text only:

Roedd y bocs ger gwely Dids
Roedd rhywbeth yn disgleirio ynddo.

The box was near Dids' bed
Something was shining in it.

The themes and tropes covered by the Level 6 books include the land of dinosaurs, Onw and the giant, a treasure chest, Robin Hood, a princess who could laugh, a shiny key, and a Christmas adventure. Even though most stories in these books are not rooted in a cultural setting, the story of Christmas being celebrated within a cold region makes its environment evident. Santa Claus is referred to as *Siôn*

Corn, the Welsh name for Santa Claus (literally 'John Chimney'). The following conversation is from a page of the Level 6 story *Antur Nadolig* (The Christmas Adventure):

Dechreuodd yr allwedd ddisgleirio.
"Nadolig llawen," meddai pawb.
"Hwyl fawr," meddai Siôn Corn.
"Diolch am bopeth."

The key started to shine.
'Merry Christmas,' said everyone.
'Goodbye,' said Santa Claus.
'Thank you for everything.'

In the Level 7 books, the amount of text is more than for previous levels, but is still less than 50 words per page. The illustration on each page remains of prime importance. The topics also expand to issues faced by older children, such as how to navigate bullies in school. Their solution is in the form of a magic key:

Roedd Rhian eisiau gweld yr allwedd hud, felly
gorfododd Dids i fynd â hi adref.
"Gad imi weld yr allwedd yma," meddai hi.
"Dwi eisiau antur hud."

Rhian wanted to see the magic key, so she
forced Dids to take her home.
'Let me see this key,' she said.
'I want a magic adventure.'

Other titles include a Roman adventure, an adventure of a submarine, a joke machine, and the freeway. The freeway story is about finding a dragon kite, and the Welsh language signs and books in the illustrations give it an extremely culturally rooted texture. The Level 8 books also follow adventures such as with the Victorians and the Vikings – stereotypes from other cultures are used as exotic characters in the fictional worlds of the Welsh children. There are also stories on pocket money and

floods, which might be topics that become familiar only after a certain age. A focus on history starts from this level, especially in the story *Sut Le Oedd Yno?* or 'What was it like there?', which describes a day in the life of children who lived through the Second World War:

Siaradodd Mam-gu â'r plant.
"Roedd y rhyfel yn amser ofnadwy i bawb," meddai.
"Doedd e ddim yn ddoniol."
"Mae'n ddrwg gyda ni, Mam-gu," meddai Dids.
"Ond roedd *hi'n bell iawn yn ôl."*

Grandma spoke to the children.
'The war was a terrible time for everyone,' she said.
'It wasn't funny.'
'It's bad for us, Grandma,' said Dids.
'But it *was* a long time ago.'

The 'magic key' anchors almost all of the stories and is a connecting factor, a solution, an eye-opener, a transition, an escape, or an adventure across stories. It is through the symbol of this magic key that the children are able to experience different emotions, cultures, time periods, behaviors, and come to important realizations. The idea to hinge the entire reading series on the magic key makes it appealing to children, creating a sense of wonder and fun.

Comparisons

This section will discuss the different strategies employed by the Hindi textbooks and the Welsh readers in order to engage students in language learning and address their social and emotional learning. These differences are analyzed for three main areas: themes, post-chapter text, and visual layout.

The Hindi and Welsh materials contrast quite starkly when it comes to the themes they cover. While the Hindi textbooks are preoccupied with representing an idea of the nation through its diverse languages, cultures, religions, states, and people, the Welsh

resources focus on the experiences of a child growing up through daily events and fantasy imaginations. Despite this, even though the Welsh books are not ostensibly preoccupied with instilling patriotic or nationalistic ideas, some terms and themes root the books in Welsh culture. This is inevitable as the Oxford Reading Tree books have been especially adapted to the Welsh language and have to use terms like *Siôn Corn* (pronounced 'Shawn Corn') instead of Santa Claus to make it culturally familiar for the students. Therefore, while the Hindi textbooks emphasize ideas of the nation that need to be communicated to children, as well as ideas of 'good behavior', the Welsh books avoid such engagements and focus on storytelling, which makes it easier for children to relate to them and create a more personal 'emotional' connection with the language as a result.

Another key dissimilarity lies in the exercises and text that follow each chapter. The Hindi textbooks have questions at the end of every chapter and encourage students to engage with questions that also go beyond the text. For instance, if the chapter is on folk songs from around the country, the post-chapter text asks students to interview their grandparents or people of an older generation to find out more about the folk songs they remember. These questions connect the chapters of the textbook to children's home experiences and at the same time fulfil a strategy of engaging with the children's socio-political and cultural environment. On the other hand, the Welsh stories have no questions. Some Hindi textbooks such as the one created by the Karnataka Board even begin with a moral of the story. For instance, one chapter mentions that the story will teach students the value of not being greedy and being content with what they have. This makes the messaging extremely clear from the start but also reduces the level of imagination possible through an engagement with the story. There is almost a burden on these textbooks to teach more than just language and stories, and to socialize students into the culture beyond language learning. The Welsh books do not place morals of the story at the start or questions at the end, and place greater trust in the ability of teachers to deliver the material as they see fit.

In terms of the visual layout, the ratio of illustrations to words per page is very telling. In the Hindi textbooks, illustrations cover approximately 10–20% of a page, while the Welsh books' pages are 80–90% visual. This too affects students' engagement with the text because this is the first impression they receive. The visual layout plays a critical role in determining the level of interest taken by students while reading the text. The images drive and complement the stories in the Welsh books, while in the Hindi books the illustrations merely support the text. It is decidedly easier for the Welsh language readers to address the social and emotional needs of students through this format, by appealing to them at a subconscious level and thereby enhancing the language-learning experience.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed language-learning materials from India and Wales to study language socialization through education in the two countries. There is a deep historical connection between India and Wales, specifically around language politics, and the paper has attempted to compare and contrast their language-teaching strategies, despite the differences in the economic settings of the two nations. How much of language teaching and learning is about language, and how much of it is about instilling in students an idea of the nation? What is the burden on language textbooks and materials to convey these ideas? How differently do these materials address the SEL needs of students in these languages?

Given the post-colonial context of both India and Wales, it is important to understand language education strategies because of the history of 'shame' associated with learning the mother tongue in both cultures. It is for this reason that it is even more important to teach the languages in a manner that is appealing and engaging for students, especially at the primary level, as it impacts language attitudes that are formed at an early age. To ensure that language learning does not become a mundane chore, it is crucial to provide engaging material in language textbooks and ensure that students' social and emotional association with it remains positive.

Through the examples shown above, it is clear that the Welsh reading books place a greater value on language teaching without engaging with students' socio-cultural and political environment. Having said that, it is almost impossible to stay completely aloof from one's cultural environment, given how deeply rooted a language is within a culture. On the other hand, the Hindi textbooks place a heavy focus on teaching ideas of patriotism, morals, ethics, and behaviors. There seems to be a huge burden on the Hindi textbooks to propagate an idea of the nation as a diverse and united entity, which is evident in the themes selected for the textbook. The chapters center on political figures, freedom fighters, and national leaders, and also on setting standards and morals for students to follow to be 'good' citizens, students, and children. There is a possibility that the association of these themes in the textbook may make students feel emotionally disconnected from the material, and ultimately form a negative attitude towards the language itself.

In conclusion, although language textbooks bear the responsibility of socializing students into the socio-cultural environment around them, there also needs to be a conscious effort in postcolonial nations to develop a deep social and emotional connection with the language learning process among the younger generation in order to move past the generational trauma and 'shame' attached to learning these languages, in comparison with English. This language hierarchy was created structurally in the 19th century through education policies drafted during the colonial rule, and percolates through to students learning these languages in primary schools today. Language socialization through textbooks in schools is a crucial building block in developing students' positive social and emotional attitudes towards their languages as they grow up. Developing positive social and emotional attitudes to mother tongue language learning needs to be taken into account while making national language-in-education policy decisions.

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5

An empirical investigation of social emotional learning among children in primary education: The case of Catch Up in Zambia

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Abstract

To tackle the learning crisis, the government of Zambia introduced the Catch Up program, using the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach. The goal of Catch Up is to increase literacy and numeracy skills among grade 3–5 learners through grouping learners by learning level (not age), using an accelerated learning methodology

and regularly measuring learning progress. Continuous professional development of school leaders and senior teachers in methods of tailored instruction is an essential component of the success of the Catch Up program. It is hypothesized that Catch Up may stimulate socioemotional learning (SEL) in addition to increasing literacy and numeracy skills. The TaRL classroom methodology includes several play-based components: the classes are joyful, socially interactive, iterative, and meaningful and the activities are designed to build confidence and are highly engaging. The promotion of accelerated learning with characteristics of play has the potential to contribute significantly to SEL (Ljubetic et al., 2020; Hromek & Roffey, 2009). This article presents preliminary findings from a research study conducted in Lusaka and Central provinces in 2022 and indicates that the Catch Up program contributed to the development of two fundamental SEL domains, empathy and conflict resolution, in participants. Positive but not significant moments were also identified in stress management. Another important finding was that in both empathy and conflict resolution, including stress management domains, community schools performed better than government schools.

Introduction

Providing quality education to all children is a challenge in many sub-Saharan African countries (Vromant et al., 2021; Asongu & Odhiambo, 2018). Previous research has demonstrated that many learners move from one grade to the next during their early to middle primary years without acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skills (Banerjee et al., 2016; Brombacher et al., 2015; Pritchett, 2013, 2015). This holds true in Zambia where a national assessment of literacy and numeracy of primary school students in 2014 revealed that nearly 1 in 7 grade 2 learners were unable to read a single word in their local language. About 38 percent of grade 5 learners were illiterate and had poor math skills (MoGE, 2016). Factors that contribute to this reality include, among other things,

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high pupil–teacher ratios, lack of teaching and learning materials, limited school infrastructure, poverty, and inadequately trained teaching staff (Piper et al., 2018).

To tackle the learning crisis, Zambia introduced the Catch Up remedial program, using the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology. TaRL, pioneered by Pratham (India), was evaluated and refined for over 15 years in collaboration with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) (Banerjee et al., 2016). Since 2015, the TaRL approach has been further adapted and refined in several African countries. A summary of the TaRL approach, and how it differs from 'business as usual' in schools, can be found in Table 1. The goal of Catch Up, in line with TaRL, is to improve literacy and numeracy skills among grade 3–5 learners. At the classroom level, TaRL is a teaching approach that assesses children using a simple testing tool and then groups them according to their learning level rather than their age or grade. For a period of the day, children in middle-to-upper primary grades focus on foundational skills using an accelerated learning methodology.

At the systems levels, the TaRL approach works with education policymakers to reorient the system towards effective learning. This work includes encouraging policymakers to dedicate time to teaching children basic skills, moving away from the age-grade structure to focus on the level of the child, setting up mentoring systems to support teachers to deliver effectively, embedding approaches of continuous improvement, and setting up systems of measurement that lead to action.

The governance structure of the Ministry of Education in Zambia is divided into provincial, district, zonal, and school administration. Staff at all these levels are trained in the TaRL methodology for the purposes of mentoring, monitoring, and training teachers at the school level. Several trainings are conducted for selected master trainers (who are ultimately Catch Up 'trainers of trainers,' selected from amongst the cadre of province, district, and zonal government coordinators), and senior officers known as education standards officers at

both provincial and district level. Another set of trainings is conducted for the headteachers, as well as new and/or refresher trainings for class teachers, on the accelerated learning methodology. In Lusaka and Central provinces, teachers were also trained on the role of play in holistic development, including SEL. In addition to training for delivery of Catch Up, teachers receive mentoring support and undertake practice periods of at least 20–25 days.

Catch Up typically consists of daily one-hour instruction, which may take place before or after school, or even – in schools with a double-shift system – during the lunch break.

A particular challenge to the Catch Up program is that Zambia is a multilingual country with approximately 72 languages in total. Seven of these are considered core languages while the rest are dialects (Banda & Mwanza, 2017). The core languages include Nyanga, Bemba, Tonga, Lozi, Lunda, Kaonde, and Luvale. The educational curriculum uses these seven languages for instruction. The curriculum also stipulates that learners from pre-school to grade 4 will learn in the local language based on the region in which the school is located and the closest native language (among the seven instructional languages) used in that locality. Catch Up is therefore delivered in a familiar language.

Data-driven decision making

Owing to its success in Eastern, Southern, and Lusaka provinces, the Catch Up program has expanded to seven of the ten provinces in Zambia from 80 pilot schools in 2016. By January 2022, about 3,300 of Zambia's approximately 8,800 primary schools were implementing Catch Up with support from VVOB, TaRL Africa, the Belgian Government, LEGO Foundation, UNICEF, and Hempel Foundation. The success of the program can be easily measured via the continuous stream of data it generates. In the program, senior teachers and grade teachers learn to assess literacy and numeracy skills among their learners three times a school year using a simple

	'Business as usual'	**Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)**
Goal & assessment	Goal is to complete the grade level textbook or curriculum. Assessments are aligned with curriculum and often complex – not suitable for classroom use.	Goal is to ensure basic foundational skills for all, with clearly articulated goals for basic reading and math. Simple one-on-one assessments conducted by instructors at three points i.e., the beginning (baseline) meant for first round of grouping, middle (midline) for tracking progress and possible regrouping based on progress made, and end of an academic cycle (endline) for general reflection of progression rate across the academic year.
Training & mentoring	Minimal continuous professional development or targeted coaching for teachers, traditionally using non-practitioner trainers.	Practical training of leaders and instructors on the approach with practice periods of at least 20–25 days.
Grouping	Full class assembled together by grade level. Whole class teaching with little room for adjusting teaching to suit learner's needs.	Learners grouped by learning level rather than by grade. Learners move quickly from one group to the next as their learning progresses.
Teaching & activities	Teachers focus mainly on whole-class instruction ('Chalk and Talk' or textbook-driven), focus on curriculum leads to teaching to the 'top of the class'.	Teachers use simple and engaging daily learning activities that can be adapted as learners progress. Learners engage in activities in large groups, small groups, and individually.
Measurement, monitoring, & review	Pen and paper assessment done at the beginning and end of a learning unit. Minimal data analysis to understand student learning or adjust teaching before moving to the next learning unit.	Simple assessment for planning, and similar assessment used periodically to track student progress, review data, and make decisions on learner progress and program design. Quick decision-making to inform program delivery and future course.

● **Table 1:** Comparison of 'Business as usual' to the Teaching at the Right Level methodology

assessment instrument. These three moments of data collection take place at the start of term 1, the end of term 1, and the end of term 2. The teachers then decide, based on the performance of the learner, whether he/she can move from one level to the next. The whole idea of grouping by learning level in Catch Up is that it has to be dynamic: children feel they can move quickly from one level to the next based on good performance. Furthermore, hardcopy aggregated school-level data are collected by zonal staff. The data is then entered into a web portal by Zonal In-Service Coordinators. The district and provincial staff have access to the portal and periodically review the data. In this way, the Ministry of Education can track learner progress in zones, districts, provinces, and even at national level.

Learning through play

At its core, the TaRL classroom methodology stimulates children to be active participants in the class, have increased interactions among peers, and work on their abilities to express themselves. It provides learners with opportunities to persevere through a difficult task and opportunities to lead others. The methodology actively promotes cooperation skills and prosocial behavior through a series of activities, and thus provides practice in social and emotional skills and values. Furthermore, the TaRL activities often have a play-based component and are adapted to the daily lives of children. The TaRL methodology also aims to build confidence by providing children with an opportunity to be heard and build their skills in a safe environment. TaRL classes are joyful (many activities are game-based), socially interactive (learners work in groups), iterative (learners have the opportunity and are encouraged to discover on their own), meaningful (making use of local materials, teaching mother tongue), and highly engaging (children actively interact with the teacher and engage in activities).

The characteristics of learning through play have been captured by a framework of 7 C's: concrete, captivating, connected,

7 C's	Examples of TaRL activities
Concrete	Most TaRL activities are interactive through using learning through play (e.g., clap and snap, basket game, group activities, storytelling, use of games, songs).
Captivating	Catch Up is much more captivating than a standard lesson, for example, with syllable cards, picture reading, peer-to-peer learning, and individual-level activities.
Connected	Contextualized content in their own familiar/local language. For example, understanding mathematical operations through using word problems connected to their daily lives.
Challenging	Regarding literacy, TaRL includes word-building games, a challenge to create as many words as possible with a certain level of competition among learners. Regarding numeracy, TaRL includes problem solving, where learners are trying various operations to figure out which one is the most appropriate method. The TaRL methodology pushes the limits of learners, who graduate from each learning level as they acquire skills and are then given more challenging tasks in the next level.
Collaborative	TaRL has whole-class, small-group, and individual-level activities. Peer-to-peer learning is encouraged, especially in comprehension activities at story level where groups present to each other and learn from each other. Learners are encouraged to ask friends for help when they get stuck.
Creative	Learners can share their thoughts, tell their stories creatively, and express feelings and emotions in an informal talk (with peers and teachers). The aim is to build an open, welcoming environment in the class where all learners are comfortable and for teachers to build friendships with learners. There is a focus on positive stories. By doing informal talk every day, every learner should at some point have an opportunity to share and discuss.
Cheerful	Joy is integrated throughout the TaRL activities. The informal setting allows for laughter, interaction, jokes, singing, dancing and clapping. All children are expected to actively participate and engage in lesson-based activities. Learners experience joy because they are being taught at their own level, which increases the feeling of success.

- **Table 2:** Characteristics of learning through play in a framework of 7 C's

challenging, collaborative, creative, and cheerful. This framework is adapted from the learning through play framework of the LEGO Foundation, which has five characteristics of play-based learning (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). The 7 C's can be applied to TaRL activities (included in the Catch Up program) and are shown in Table 2.

The following examples illustrate the 7 C's as applied to two activities in the Catch Up program.

- Captivating: Learners are attracted and interested in the activity. They logically connect sentences to the first sentence given by the teacher or their fellow learners.
- Challenging: Learners are challenged to connect the sentences that are similar in context and have logical connections to make a story with a proper ending, sequence of events, and accurate punctuation marks and tenses.
- Creative: Learners are given choice and freedom to decide how they will make the story, which sentences they will use, the sequence of events, and how the story will end.
- Collaborative: Learners interact, exchange ideas, and learn from each other.
- Cheerful: Learners have fun and engage with laughter.

Research on Catch Up and SEL

Socioemotional learning is the process of acquiring skills that empower children with abilities to build healthy relationships, cope better with stress, engage in healthy conflict, empathize, and be aware of self and those around us. As pointed out by Coryn et al. (2009, pp. 283–284), 'Social-emotional learning (SEL) goes by many names: emotional intelligence, emotional quotient, social intelligence, and social-emotional competence.' Throughout this article, we define SEL as a process of developing intra- and interpersonal knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindsets that individuals need to succeed in life (Taylor et al., 2018).

Story making - Go Ahead

Outcome of this activity:

- Construct sentences in a logical order to tell a story.

Process:

Teacher will:

- Divide learners into groups and ask them to appoint a leader in each group.
- Each group is supposed to make one story by using a sentence as a thread.
- The group leader will say the first sentence and write it down.
- Then each group member adds one sentence in turn. This is written down by the group leader.
- When everyone has added their sentence, the group leader will read out the story.
- Groups will reflect on their story – does it make sense? Does it have a good sequence? Etc.
- Then the class will hear stories and discuss.

Important points

- Ensure that all the sentences are in a similar context and have some kind of connection to make a story.
- The story should have a proper ending.
- Tenses should be used properly: for example, if it starts in past tense then it should end in past tense.
- The sequence of events should be connected to make the plot clear.
- If the story does not seem to have an end, then ask the group to form an ending using new words.
- The leader then tells the story.

- **Example 1:** Story making – 'Go Ahead'

Word and sentence building with flash cards

Outcomes of this activity:

- Strengthen skills of word and sentence formation from sounds and syllables.

Process:

Teacher will:

- Divide learners into two or more groups. Each group is given a set of similar flash cards.
- Give each group 5–10 minutes to make and write as many words as they can from the flash cards. This can be a competition to engage learners. (Flash cards can be reused.)
- Then choose a learner from each group to read the words that their group has made. Ask the group how many words they made.
- Encourage learners to identify meaningful and meaningless words.
- Give each group some additional words. The groups then make sentences using the new flash cards and the words they have already made.
- Ask a learner from each group to read the sentences they have made. The class is asked if the sentences make sense.
- Challenging: Learners are pushed to think and come up with words and sentences that have meaning using the available flashcards and that can be quite demanding but stimulating.
- Concrete: The use of syllable and word flashcards in groups takes the form of a game and this in itself is an activity that is concrete in nature.
- Connected: The syllables and words are usually expected to be in a familiar language of instruction. It also builds on words that the learners already know and the words that have meaning culturally are also accepted.
- Creative: Learners are encouraged to be make whatever words they feel are possible in the shortest period. This stimulates creativity and sometimes, they make words that do not have meaning but can be read phonologically.
- Collaborative: Learners work together in teams to make words that are possible with flashcards.
- Cheerful: Learners have fun because it feels like a play competition as they make words and there is a lot of excitement involved.

- **Example 2:** Word and sentence building with flash cards

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The current study adheres to the work of D'Sa and Krupar (2019) who investigated SEL among a group of Syrian refugee children using the International Social Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA). This research instrument was developed for a target group of vulnerable children in primary education and includes psychometric measurements. Not many other research instruments measuring SEL in low resource contexts focus on children in primary education (Parker, Van Beek & Callanan, 2019). Furthermore, many children in Zambia grow up in poverty, with the daily stress associated with it. Finally, the ISELA is a tool that is easy to contextualize and flexible to adapt, it can easily be used among respondents with low literacy levels, and it has no restrictive copyright conditions.

This article hypothesizes that Catch Up may stimulate socioemotional learning (SEL) in addition to increasing literacy and numeracy skills. One of the reasons for this hypothesis is that TaRL is a learning through play methodology. Some of the opportunities it provides in its bundle of activities, drawing on research that has linked learning through play to SEL (Ljubetic, Maglica, & Vukadin, 2020; Hromek & Roffey, 2009), have the potential to impact SEL. However, the evidence base for the effects of TaRL explicitly on developing these SEL skills is anecdotal: the hypothesis was not covered in Banerjee et al. (2016). The effects of ability grouping on SEL are also under-studied.

Interestingly, for our multilingual country of study, Zambia, the word 'feeling' or 'emotion' is not fully captured in its languages. Instead, Zambian languages contextually use 'hearing' to mean feeling in almost all contexts. Therefore, socioemotional learning is also synonymously identified by researchers and professionals in Zambia as friendliness, neighborliness, and goodness but these words, while important in being contextually relevant, do not cover the full meaning of SEL. There is need for research to explore and develop tools that measure socioemotional learning from a Zambian cultural context (Gehlbach et al., 2018; Meyer et al., 2018). The

Perseverance domain

We will now play a game. First, can you tell me which hand you use to write your name?

For this game, you should ask the child to draw using their non-dominant hand. If they use their right hand to write their name, they should use their left hand in the game. If they use their left hand to write their name, they should use their right hand in the game.

I am going to show you a picture and I want you to use your <non-dominant> hand to draw that picture. You must always use your <non-dominant> hand. You can use your other hand to hold the paper but you cannot draw using that hand. If you get frustrated or you feel like you cannot do the drawing please tell me. We can then move to the next activity. Okay? Are you ready to play this game?

1) Show the child the first laminated card. Give the child 60 seconds to draw the picture.
   At 20 and 40 seconds if the child is still drawing, say: "You can stop at any time and we can move to the next game."
   - IF THE CHILD GIVES UP BEFORE 60 SECONDS, THEN MARK 'INCORRECT' for item F1 in the scoring sheet and proceed to F2.
   - IF THE CHILD IS FINISHES THE DRAWING WITHIN 60 SECONDS OR IS STILL DRAWING AT THE END OF 60 SECONDS MARK 'CORRECT' for Item F1 in the scoring sheet and proceed to F2
   - If the child is still drawing at the end of 60 seconds tell him/her that he/she has done well and that you will now move to the next drawing.
2) Follow the same instructions as above for card 1
3) Follow the same instructions as above for card 1
4) Follow the same instructions as above for card 1

| #	Item	Correct	Incorrect	No Response	Skip pattern
F1	Child completed first drawing OR was still drawing at the end of 60 seconds	1	0	999	
F2	Child completed second drawing OR was still drawing at the end of 60 seconds	1	0	999	If 0 or 999 G 1
F3	Child completed third drawing OR was still drawing at the end of 60 seconds	1	0	999	
F4	Child completed fourth drawing OR was still drawing at the end of 60 seconds	1	0	999	

● **Example 3:** Measuring SEL with ISELA (Perseverance domain)

competencies captured in the ISELA are the closest we could get to capturing social-emotional learning in Zambia so far.

The research instrument discussed in D'Sa and Krupar (2019) includes five SEL domains, namely: self-concept, stress management, empathy, perseverance, and conflict resolution:

- *self-concept* – the child's ability to express personal preferences, feelings, and abilities;
- *stress management* – the child's conscious use of personal skills and resources to reduce the impact of stress;
- *perseverance* – the child's ability to stay on task even if the task is difficult or the child experiences delay in achieving success;
- *empathy* – the child's ability to be aware and understand the emotions and expectations of others;
- *conflict resolution* – a child's interpersonal conflict resolution strategies.

Apart from these five domains, the ISELA includes two other scales: *relationships* – a child's understanding and utilization of their social networks and support system across varying situations – and *learning environment safety* – a child's understanding of the safety in their environment, i.e., the school. The relationship scale shows how a child engages their network as they navigate all the other domains, hence it includes items reflecting every scale. Learning environment safety is beyond the scope of this article. When using the ISELA, the assessor presents stimuli to the child and asks a range of questions to the child. These questions are picture-based and scenario-based, and the child is given an opportunity to respond. An example of how the perseverance domain is assessed is demonstrated in Example 3.
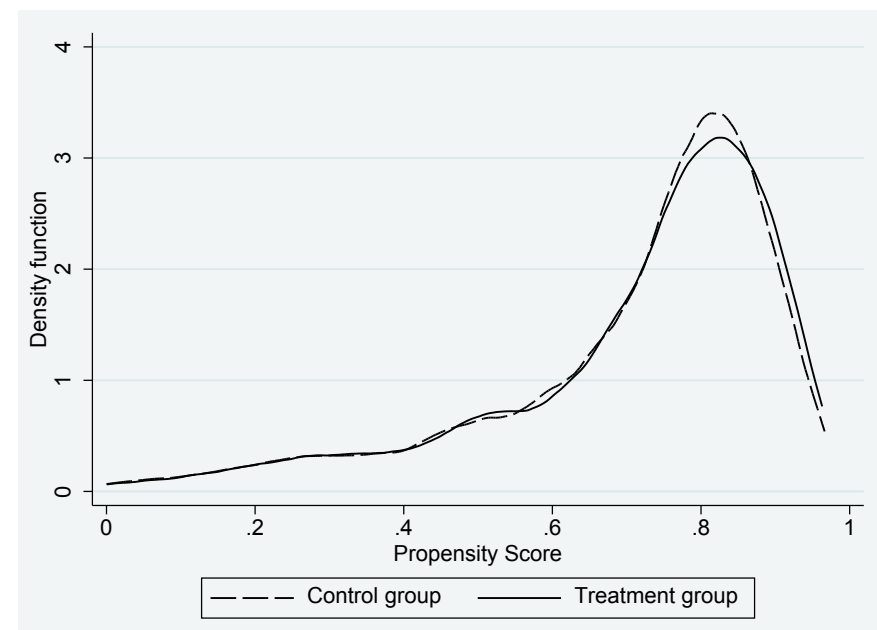
- **Figure 1:** The Kernel density function assessing overlap in the propensity scores of the treatment and control group[1]

1   For the propensity score matching analysis, we used the Kernel density function to assess the overlap in distribution of child characteristics between Lusaka and Central province. It is an important assumption of the difference-in-differences analysis that children between the treatment and control group are comparable. Matching analysis can make our impact estimates more robust. The propensity score matching technique produces propensity scores; they reflect the likelihood that children attend a school in Lusaka based on their background characteristics. Based on the propensity scores, we weigh the untreated children to match those children in Lusaka province. The distribution of the propensity scores derived from the child characteristics is presented in figure 1, which indicates a strong overlap in child characteristics between the treatment group and the control group. We lose only one observation because of not finding an appropriate match.

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The Catch Up socioemotional learning research

Research Question

Does TaRL, as a methodology, including features of learning through play, contribute to socio-emotional learning?

Intervention

Learners in the treatment group were exposed to the Catch Up program and trainings on learning through play and socioemotional learning were provided for teachers, headteachers and education standards officers, district and provincial education leaders, followed up by coaching and mentoring visits. During the visits, education leaders were re-oriented, and teachers were coached on the importance of the learning through play process. Emphasis was placed on discussions regarding the importance of intentionality and consciousness of SEL skills during the playful numeracy and literacy lesson delivery in TaRL.

Methodology and process

Data of children in grades 3–5 were collected from a treatment group (Lusaka province) and a control group (Central province) using the ISELA at two different points in time (February and November 2022). The initial target was to conduct 3,000 learner assessments on SEL in 100 schools (50 in Central province and 50 in Lusaka province). Selection of schools was random but stratified by community and government schools, with the aim of selecting an equal sample of boys and girls and across grades. On one hand, community schools are supported by a community and well-wishers and also are run mostly by volunteer staff with a few government teachers (Zambia Open Community schools). On the other hand, government schools are owned by the government with full support of the ministry of education; their staff are all government employees. The Centre for Promotion of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa (CAPOLSA) led the data collection in the two phases of the research.

	Baseline study	Endline study	D'Sa & Krupar (2019)
Self-concept	0.92	0.91	0.91
Stress management	0.75	0.75	0.70
Empathy	0.70	0.69	0.69
Perseverance	0.79	0.68	0.77
Conflict resolution	0.73	0.70	0.78

● **Table 3:** Internal consistency reliability of the five SEL domains and comparison with findings of D'Sa and Krupar (2019)

Comparability of samples

In February, CAPOLSA initially assessed 2,619 learners. These learners were tracked in the endline study. In November, CAPOLSA was able to assess 1,977 learners, using the same research instrument as in the baseline study. The sample (N=1,951 learners) used for analysis of the data includes two observations per child, one at baseline, and one at endline.

Internal reliability of the scales

The internal consistency reliability of our study as compared to the study of D'Sa and Krupar (2019) is shown in Table 3. Cronbach Alpha was run to check for internal consistency. This statistic reflects the quality or reliability of a scale. It indicates to what degree questions in a scale reliably measure the same underlying concept consistently (e.g., whether respondents responded to the questions in a consistent manner). As a rule of thumb, the statistic should be equal to or above 0.7 to conclude reliability. We find similar reliability in the baseline study and endline study. The domain of perseverance is only marginally below the threshold and still provides satisfactory internal consistency. These findings and conclusions are in line with D'Sa and Krupar.

Figure 2: Cohen's d measure of standardized effect sizes

Preliminary findings

This study utilized Cohen's d to assess the effectiveness of the Catch-Up intervention program on socioemotional learning in primary school students. Our analysis was conducted using a difference-in-difference analysis using multi-level regression, with baseline and endline studies conducted to capture the impact of the program. Our models were designed to capture effect sizes beyond 0.15 standard deviations, ensuring that our analysis only accounted for significant changes in the outcomes of interest. The results of our analysis indicate that the Catch Up intervention had a positive impact on the students' socioemotional learning, particularly in the areas of empathy and conflict resolution. The findings in the figures below demonstrate the results.

Learning through play and SEL are common concepts in early childhood education but are still uncommon practices in primary education in Zambia. The Catch Up remedial program provides an opportunity for learners in primary education to benefit from its activities with their characteristics of learning through play. The findings of the research study in Lusaka province (treatment group) and Central province (control group) on the contributions of Catch Up to SEL indicate a positive and significant impact on two of the five SEL domains. Controlling for the baseline study, and including demographic characteristics in a multilevel regression analysis (including gender, age, grade, home language, and parents' reading skills), learners improved their skills in empathy and conflict resolution. The estimated effect sizes are small to moderate in magnitude and range from 0.2 to 0.3 standard deviations. The largest impacts are found in the community schools, with 0.296 SD with regard to empathy and 0.340 SD with regard to conflict resolution.

Two other domains, self-concept and stress management, moved in a positive direction, but the effect sizes are so small (less than 0.15 SD) that we cannot claim them to be significant. The research would benefit from longer exposure time and evaluation of the SEL domains, as the Catch Up Lusaka program ran for only nine months effectively in the schools.

Discussion

From previous studies, conducted mainly in India, it is known that Teaching at the Right Level significantly improves literacy and numeracy when well implemented. Besides level-based activities focused on increasing numeracy and literacy, the classroom methodology embraces learning through play in many of the learning activities. Through its bundle of activities, TaRL provides learners with opportunities that increase interaction, the ability to express oneself, opportunities to persevere through a difficult task, opportunities to lead others, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, cooperation skills and prosocial behavior. In Zambia, school leaders and teachers are encouraged to ensure that Catch Up lessons are delivered in a playful manner by introducing them through the 7 C's framework. Learning through play practices were equally followed up in schools in Lusaka province during mentoring and coaching visits for purposes of

strengthening the use of a learning-through-play methodology in primary schools.

The Catch Up program, using teacher professional development to promote remedial teaching with characteristics of play, has the potential to contribute significantly to socioemotional learning. Although the mainstream curriculum may impact SEL in some ways, the Catch Up program helps to make the SEL outcomes intentional and deliberate by strengthening SEL-focused learning through play teaching processes. Findings from the research study conducted in Lusaka and Central province in 2022 indicate that Catch Up contributes to SEL in the domains of empathy and conflict resolution. The possible reason for the performance of learners in the two domains could be the ability grouping of learners in TaRL, which encourages equality among different grades and strengthens the spirit of cooperation and prosocial behavior and less of competition. This condition has the potential to reduce bad conflict and also increase empathy. However, this argument is subject to further investigation in the possible scale-up.

Conclusions and recommendations

From the findings of this study, the Catch Up methodology has the potential to build SEL competencies in learners with increased exposure and strengthened coaching of teachers on intentional ways of building SEL skills during Catch Up lessons.

The study will need scaling up to investigate the potential of Catch Up in building SEL skills with additional adaptations of measures and contextualization of the implementation of SEL.

Education policy makers may need to consider making the cultivation of SEL skills in primary education more explicit and intentional. This has the potential for reducing negative developmental outcomes. By the time of adolescence, learners can acquire competencies that enable them to explore the stress and storm that come with this phase in their lives while at the same time getting the most out of their primary education.

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6

English and Mother Tongues in the Philippines: Reflections on language policies and education

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss issues of language policies in education in multilingual contexts such as the Philippines. I argue that in multilingual contexts, language policies that have an impact on schooling need to align carefully with the linguistic realities of students and teachers alike. As the Philippine experience seems to suggest, in a multilingual ecology, the divide between languages such as English and local languages can be a highly artificial one, which schools may further widen by selecting one language or the other as the medium of instruction. In such a context, the distinctions between L1 or L2 or mother languages and second or foreign languages may not be helpful for learning. Rather, what could be helpful are school policies that make space for the languages that students bring into the learning environment, such as those that welcome plurilingualism and translanguaging practices. In this way, students, no matter what their language background is, are affirmed and feel welcomed in school.

Introduction: The story of English in the Philippines

My home country, the Philippines, serves as an interesting case study for language history, politics, policies, and education. English arrived in this multilingual country of over 170 languages in 1898, toward the end of the Philippine–American war (Bolton and Bautista, 2009). The language was first taught by an American priest and soon after, by American servicemen. These early teachers were followed by American public school teachers who arrived aboard the *Thomas*, a U.S. military vessel, in 1901. Known as the Thomasites, these teachers brought the beginnings of the American public school system to the country. As Gonzalez (2009) argues, the Philippines was a 'favorable soil' for English. Within the first decade of English in the country, the University of the Philippines had produced its first collection of literary works in English. Gonzalez further adds that the second decade of English in the Philippines saw the beginnings of a Philippine variety of English, distinct from American and British varieties.

It was in 1900 when U.S. President McKinley declared that English be the medium of instruction in the Philippines. There were practical reasons for this as all teaching materials were in English and the teachers were American (Bernardo, 2009). English was also positioned then as the language that promised job opportunities (Gonzalez, 2009). However, in the succeeding decades, much criticism was levelled against what was essentially an American public school system on Philippine soil, which led to what Philippine historian, Constantino, eventually described, in the 1950s, as 'the miseducation of the Filipino'. Or, as Martin (2009) pointed out, the creation of 'a brown American' who was ideologically and culturally aligned with U.S. interests.

Criticisms against English as the medium of instruction, compounded with nationalist movements from the 1960s to the 1980s, saw more space for local languages in the classroom, particularly the national language, Filipino. Eventually, bilingual education policies allowed for a split in the roles that languages

played. Filipino was used for subjects like social science and local literature but subjects like mathematics and sciences remained in English; in other words, Filipino was the language of identity and community while English was the language of specialized disciplines and global concerns (Gonzalez, 2009).

In the 1970s, President Marcos published an advertisement in *The New York Times* on the economic viability of hiring labor from the Philippines (Mahboob and Cruz, 2013). This advertisement spelled out that the cost of hiring English-speaking labor from the Philippines was low. The combination of cheap labor and English was instrumental in forming the kind of economy the Philippines still depends on today: that is, an economy substantially kept afloat by remittances from a labor force working outside the country. The 1990s also saw the ballooning of outsourcing firms in the Philippines (Lockwood, Forey, & Price, 2009), where businesses from the U.S. or U.K., such as banks and insurance firms, would outsource their customer service to the Philippines and hire customer care agents for much less. This industry, for obvious reasons, is heavily dependent on the English of its Philippine labor force. Because of the strong link of English with upward mobility and cultural capital, bilingual policies led to the sentiment that the populace would lose English and all the opportunities it afforded. Hence, English has remained a prestige language in the country, as all board exams are in English and more prestigious social domains, such as higher education, business, the law, and some higher-end forms of media, remain in English.

Despite the positive effects of the rise of English in the country, it has also led to the rise of inequalities that are related to English. As Bernardo cautioned in 2009, English-dominated education policies were only working for children who had access to English in their homes. These children were generally from middle to upper income families who could also afford to send their children to private schools that had English as the medium of instruction. Therefore, the quality of one's English was also largely dependent on family economic levels. Gonzalez (2009) has pointed out that the extent

to which a person's English may be considered 'good', or similar to educated varieties of American English, was dependent on the school they went to. If parents were poor but were willing to find ways to raise the tuition money for private schools, then the child learned very good English. Children who went to English-medium schools were generally likely to find a place in industries and jobs, whether in the Philippines or abroad, that place a premium on English. Students from well-off or financially stable families grew up with English, went to English-medium schools, and could draw on their knowledge of English to find jobs that offered a strong chance of financial success. Furthermore, as Doplon pointed out in 2018, the split between local languages for subjects such as social science and English for subjects such as math, science, and even art made it appear that only students who were proficient in English, generally from already upper-income families, could succeed in these subjects. Hence, class relations in the Philippines have been inextricably linked with language relations.

A little over a decade ago, amidst alarming news of poor student performance (Luz, 2010), the Philippines decided to give mother-tongue education a try, which came along with the shift to a K–12 educational system. Since the 1920s, research on language and education in the Philippines had articulated the problem of learning in English (Bernardo, 2009). From the 1940s to the turn of the century, various studies on education in the Philippines, particularly in basic education, suggested that students learn better across all subjects in their mother tongues. Students could also easily learn English a few months after being exposed to English as a medium of instruction (Nolasco, 2008). But it was the work of Dekker et al. in the 2000s, involving indigenous Philippine communities, that provided compelling evidence of the benefits of learning in mother tongues. Theirs was a 10-year project that resulted in their students scoring higher in standardized tests, including tests of English, than students who *had* to learn in English. Because of evidence that strongly correlated education in the mother tongue with student success, in 2009, the Department

of Education (DepEd) implemented the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) policy, which opened a space for learning in the mother tongues. However, as Doplon (2018) pointed out, mother tongues were still secondary to the national language, Filipino, and English. The policy, although more reflective of the multilingual ecology of the country, only encouraged learning in the mother tongues up to third grade, whereupon they could be replaced by Filipino for civics-related subjects and English for math and science. Unfortunately, after only about a decade, the DepEd is now considering lessening the role of mother tongues in education, citing, among other reasons, issues in implementation and teacher readiness ('Use of mother tongue', 2020).

The Philippine experience, thus far, can provide interesting ground for discussing language in education. In particular, I seek to answer the question of what languages are best for schooling, especially in multilingual ecologies whose various languages have been dominated by English.

The language of learning

Although English in the Philippines touches on many aspects and issues of Philippine life, including economic and social opportunities, it is its impact on education in a multilingual country that is the concern of this paper. The larger question that frames the roles of languages, whether English or local languages in education, is *what language/s are best for schooling*? This is not an easy question; the answer involves issues ranging from personal preference to politics to language development. To come to possible answers, in this section, I will discuss the concepts of language allocation, language as meta-knowledge, and language development, while keeping the Philippine experience in mind.

The most obvious answer to the question on what the language/s of learning should be is simply, the mother tongue/s of the students. In other words, the language/s the students were *allocated*, or exposed to, learned, and used in their homes and communities

(Mahboob, 2011). These are the language/s they bring to school and the language/s they communicate the knowledge they had prior to schooling. If the language/s of their school environment are similar to the language/s of their home environment, then children learn new knowledge in school in the same language/s. But, if the child comes to a school with different language/s, then the child has to learn the language/s of schooling and learn new knowledge in those language/s. In such a situation, the child may fall behind due to a misalignment between the language/s of home and the language/s of school. In the Philippines, because English was the language of schooling for decades, this misalignment was visible; hence, Nolasco (2008) argued that what was 'plaguing' Philippine education was that the students had to learn in a language they could not understand. This led to low grades and general poor performance. At the same time, Nolasco also argued, that students who learn in their mother tongues do better, even in assessments *in* English and assessments *of* English. So, one answer to the question, *what language/s are best for schooling*, is: whatever languages the students were allocated. A mastery in these languages serves as the ground for learning new languages (Nolasco, 2008).

However, in the multilingual context of the Philippines, what the mother tongue/s of students is/are is not clear cut. Filipino children grow up with at least two languages or, to add an additional factor, at least two distinct languages as well as a mixture of these languages. For example, I grew up not only with both English and Filipino but with *Taglish*, that 'mix' of Filipino and English that is common in urban Manila. But, my grandmother spoke Bisaya, Filipino, English, and a combination of the three. Batanes, the northernmost province of the Philippines, sees school children using English, Filipino, Ivatan, and, as expected, a mix of all three. That languages combine is not a new phenomenon and a lot of work has gone into the meanings that these combinations generate, as Rafael (2009) and, recently, Martin and Cruz (2018) have shown. Filipinos would also, for example, generally say *punta tayo sa beach*, using the English word rather than the Filipino, which would be *punta tayo*

sa dagat. *Dagat* and *beach* do not mean the same but *beach* captures the feel of the summer experience, of playing in the sand as well as the water, which the word *dagat* (sea) would not. Barratt (2017) has argued that in contexts such as the Philippines, the distinction between the lexis of languages that belong to two different linguistic systems may not be clear. *Beach* is as much a Filipino word as it is an English one, as Filipino has no word for what would be 'the beach experience'.

When it comes to determining the language/s of schooling, the related issues of language as meta-knowledge and language development need to be considered. First, language as meta-knowledge. Knowledge of a language is the type of knowledge needed to acquire other forms of knowledge (Cruz & Mahboob, 2018) in that language. As such, language is meta-knowledge. Without knowledge of English, one would not be able to acquire knowledge expressed in English. This brings us to issues of access and availability. English as a medium of instruction in the Philippines also came out of the fact that learning materials were in English (Bernardo, 2009). One major challenge that mother tongue-based learning faced in the Philippines, apart from the difficulty of ascertaining what mother tongues *were*, was the lack of learning materials in local languages (PIDS, 2020). How it is possible to teach in local languages even with materials in English will be discussed later in this paper.

The question of *what* knowledge is expressed in which language/s is now necessary to consider. Martin (2008) has written, following the work of educational sociologist Basil Bernstein, that there are two kinds of knowledge, expressed in two types of discourses – the horizontal and the vertical – where vertical discourses express 'the abstract learned knowledge of science, social science, and the humanities' (p. 53) while horizontal discourses express 'the everyday common sense ways of knowing' (p. 53). The difference between the two is what Martin (2008) characterized as the interrelated positions of 'sense' (specialized knowledge) and 'sensibility' (community, common sense knowledge). Generally,

named human languages have the potential to express both types of knowledge or already express both types of knowledge to some extent. But, as schooling provides training in specialized knowledges, the languages of schooling need a certain level of verticality. That is, these languages have been used to express specialized knowledge in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. In the Philippines, the sciences remain the domain of English while the humanities and social sciences have to some extent been the domain of English and Filipino, the national language. Bernardo (2009) articulated that a challenge facing schooling in local languages in the Philippines was the lack of 'intellectualization' of these languages, which I take to mean, the lack of verticality of these languages. This brings us to questions of language development.

What makes a language 'developed' is a thorny issue, fraught with history, politics, and attitudes to language. All languages, after all, can do what they are meant to do. Everett (2012) explains that 'all human languages are tools. Tools to solve the twin problems of communication and social cohesion' (Everett, 2012, Introduction). To elaborate, we communicate because we need to be heard somehow. Something needs doing and language enables that. But we all communicate within a social group, so certain forms of communication are more welcome or work better in some groups than in others. As all languages enable communication and social relationships, then, from the perspective of what languages should do, all languages are equal. But, if we add the dimensions of horizontality and verticality as well as the users and uses of language, the picture becomes different.

In his work on language variation, Mahboob (2014) proposes that when it comes to variations internal to languages, clines between user and use, low social distance and high social distance need to be considered. For example, I could use a very casual form of English and/or Filipino or Taglish with friends and family as our closeness makes the social distance between us low. In situations like these, English/Filipino/Taglish can be used to express sensibility or

horizontality. On the other hand, when I speak in formal occasions such as academic conferences or write papers such as this one, my use of language takes on a more formal or academic tone as I am now addressing an audience at a higher social distance from me. In the Philippines, as higher domains such as economics, business, academics of all kinds remain in English, then local languages remain the languages of low social distance for uses that are horizontal and community-based. These languages though, for whatever reason, are not called to express verticality or high social distance which limits their 'intellectualization' or development. In the Philippines, for example, there is a lot of creative writing in Filipino, which implies a verticality in the humanities but there is not much in terms of academic writing in Filipino in the sciences. Even in local conferences on the languages of the Philippines, most presenters would use English.

This is not to say that all languages need to develop verticality. However, the languages of schooling, as they are meant to express specialized knowledge, do need a certain level of verticality. But this also does not mean that local languages *have* not or *cannot* or *do* not play a role in schooling. In fact, based on anecdotal evidence, teachers have been using local languages in their classrooms to translate and explain content, which is practice also noted by Ollerhead, Prinsloo, and Krause (2018) in Australian schools with refugee students. Furthermore, in the Philippines, teachers manage classrooms through local languages, using them to call attention to student behavior (Cruz & Mahboob, 2018).

However, these uses of local languages are instances of spoken language in community contexts and not quite the vertical contexts of specialized knowledge which tend to also be expressed in written forms. What are the implications of local languages only expressing horizontal, spoken, and meanings of lower social distance? In 2013, Mahboob and I argued that without developing local languages to express vertical discourses and relationships of higher social distance, English will remain the language of power, which will maintain a general attitude pervading in the Philippines,

which is the 'fear' of losing English (Martin, 2010) and derail what Nolasco (2008) described as the goal of mother tongue-based education, which is to 'fi[x] education through language' (p. 85). With perceptions toward the power of English remaining, which Mahboob and I confirmed through a survey in 2012, the position of mother tongues in schooling will remain weak. There are few indications today, 10 years after that survey was conducted, that attitudes toward languages in the Philippines have changed. These challenges facing mother tongue-based education, which I have described here, are among the factors leading the DepEd to consider doing away with mother tongues in education totally. In the meantime, Philippine school children still score low in proficiency exams (Magsambol, 2020) and the response to this seems to be to add more English, such as the case of Cebu, a province in the south of the Philippines ('Cebu governor', 2019), as opposed to improving education in the mother tongue, which research has indicated to be an important factor in improving test scores.

Reimagining the language/s of learning

In the previous section, I discussed some language-related problems that impact on Philippine education. By no means are these the only challenges that education in my country faces but they do give indications of what may be done to move forward and improve learning. In this section, I offer the perspective of *plurilingualism*, to be supported by an openness to *translingual* practices, as possible ways forward. I also offer a suggestion for how local languages can be used in education which scaffolds learning and possibly develops the verticality of these languages.

The challenges faced by mother tongue-based education policies in the Philippines arise from misconceptions of how languages relate to each other in multilingual ecologies. In these ecologies, speakers can draw on language reservoirs that cut across individual languages to express themselves in various contexts. Barratt (2017) writes that the term *plurilingual* is more appropriate than

multilingual because the latter assumes a separation of individual languages while *plurilingual* assumes that all these languages form a single repertoire, which can be drawn on by an individual in various ways to suit various purposes (see also Ollerhead, Choi, & French, 2018). As such, in a multilingual ecology, individuals are plurilingual, and may not necessarily separate one language system from the other in their uses of these languages, such as the example of the word *beach* above. Taking a plurilingual lens allows the reframing of language policies and the reimagining of language practices in education. It also allows for a rethinking of the relationship between mother languages and English.

Language in education policies in the Philippines, whether English-based or bilingual or mother tongue-based, are haunted by the specter of monolingualism or the monolingual bias, which Barratt (2017) explains is a 'prototype' that assumes monolingualism rather than multilingualism. She points out that this bias is palpable in practices in linguistic research, such as the tendency to separate 'first language' from 'second' or 'subsequent language'. She further argues that studies on language and the brain also privilege monolingualism as there are few studies that consider the brains of multilinguals. In the Philippines, language in education policies have carried this bias regardless of whether the policy is English as a medium of instruction, bilingual, or multilingual policies: languages are separated from each other in so many ways, whether in relation to what language/s are used for what subjects, what grade levels students should use what language, or policies that allow a transition between local languages to English. The results are the challenges mentioned above confronting mother tongue education, such as the lack of clarity regarding what the students' mother tongues are and the lack of materials in mother tongues. But, if a plurilingual lens is applied, then education policies can draw on the full impact of a multilingual country to their plurilingual students. Doing so would have the following good effects.

Teacher	*Mga bata, ngayon aaralin natin ang mga nouns. Ang mga nouns ay ang tinatawag ng mga pangngalan sa Filipino. Ngayon,* nouns *sa Ingles ang topic natin.* (Children, today, we learn about nouns. Nous are called *pangngalan* in Tagalog. Today, nouns in English is our topic.)	In this Prepare phase, the teacher is introducing the lesson in a local language but the concept is named in English. The teacher also does a bit of elaborating as the concept in English is translated into Filipino. There's also the plurilingual use of 'topic', an English word, in a Filipino utterance, which is reflective of Taglish.
Focus	*Ang na nga ang Filipino para sa* noun?	In the Focus phase, the teacher draws students' attention to a particular feature of language. In this case, the teacher asks a question.
Student/s	*Pangngalan*	In this Task phase, the students fulfill the task by providing a response to the question, in whatever language/s is required.
Teacher	Very good.	In the Evaluate phase, the student/s is/are affirmed. The affirmation can possibly be in whatever language/s
Elaborate	*Kagaya sa Filipino, ang noun ay yung name o pangalan ng tao or bagay.* (Just like in Filipino, a noun is the name of a person or thing.)	In the Elaborate phase, the local language (Taglish in this case) is used, which enables the learning of an English concept in Taglish

● **Table 1:** Using plurilingual resources in classroom talk

First, learning materials can remain in English but the plurilingual ethos can be used to scaffold the learning of any and all content. In this case, the teacher can lead the students to understand and apply content in English using plurilingual resources (Cruz & Mahboob, 2018). With the purposeful use of a plurilingual repertoire, learning materials can be in English but the process of learning them can be in mother languages. Rose and Martin (2012) point out that learning activity involves five phases: 'Prepare', 'Focus', 'Task', 'Evaluate', and 'Elaborate'. In any and all of these phases, local languages can be used purposefully to build knowledge in any language.

Table 1 is an example of the use of plurilingual resources in a learning activity.

From this sample, it can be observed that even if content is in English (or another language), the careful scaffolding of the teaching, in any language/s, is what enables the progression of the learning activity and, hopefully, the students' learning itself. It also does not matter what distinctions exist between languages (like English and Filipino) because students and teachers can draw on their one repertoire composed of all these languages to enable learning, such as the examples above which use Taglish. In multilingual Philippines, languages exist close to each other so this leads to a plurilingual brain where one repertoire composed of these languages results in practices of *translanguaging* (Canagarajah, 2013), which refers to how different languages are integrated into a plurilingual's linguistic repertoire and deployed in various practices. The example above also shows how local languages can be used to learn English, which is a way to mitigate fears in the Philippines of losing English as more local languages are potentially introduced in education. This brings us to the issue of language as meta-knowledge.

If local languages have yet to develop verticality, then it is not surprising that most learning content is in English. Therefore, the meta-knowledge needed to learn this content is knowledge of English. As seen in the example above, it is possible to use mother languages to learn English. Kartika-Ningsih (2016), for example, offers a look into how local languages can be used to teach English with positive results in Indonesian classrooms. She also argues that the systematic use of these local languages in the phases of the learning activity is essential. If local languages are used in the 'Elaborate' phase, then they are used to explain the meanings of technical knowledge, which may hopefully add to their verticality later on. And, also in Kartika-Ningsih's study, the interspersing of languages can slowly allow students to become more comfortable in the language that needs to be learned, like English.

Speaking of English, as a language that is part of the multilingual ecology of the Philippines, it can also be considered a mother tongue in the Philippines (Paterno, 2018). It is documented that a number of Philippine children (such as myself) grew up with English as a mother tongue. Many Philippine children go to private schools, which use English. The problem, as mentioned earlier, is that an English-medium of instruction policy privileges only these children, who generally come from middle or upper middle class to upper class families. The plurilingual lens opens spaces for English as a mother tongue, which supports the learning of children from a certain demographic, but at the same time, allows the learning of English for children from all backgrounds. A key to any mother tongue policy, after all, is to identify and welcome all possible mother tongues and in a plurilingual individual, any language, including English, can form a part of that person's repertoire so it is no longer the case of one mother tongue (as opposed to 'additional' languages) but one *repertoire* for meaning-making.

Returning to the issue of verticality, as I have mentioned, this is a difficult one, which is also affected by attitudes to language and language affiliation. If language allocation refers to the language/s children were given in their homes, language affiliation refers to the language/s individuals want to 'affiliate' with or the languages of the communities they want to join (Mahboob, 2011). Language affiliation is about economics and financial success more than the languages themselves. These attitudes will only change if mother languages are perceived to carry economic and social power. That issue was already brought up by our study on language attitudes in 2013 (Mahboob & Cruz, 2013) and current attempts to reduce the role of mother tongues in education is a sign that attitudes have not changed. But, as more mother tongues are welcomed in important domains, such as education, then hopefully, these attitudes can change a little at a time.

Conclusion: Enabling student success

As I end this paper, it is useful to consider the factors that lead to student success. What language/s to use in schooling is just one factor. Students' financial background, an environment supportive of literacy, teachers' experience, and various psycho-social concerns are also part of the factors that contribute to students' success. However, a very personal factor is also very important, namely: affirmation and success across the many processes of learning. After all, successfully learning something can also inspire a person to keep learning. Rose and Martin (2012) discussed the importance of affirmation in the classroom, which is why the 'Evaluate' phase of the learning activity is important. All students need the chance to be affirmed. Kartika-Ningsih (2016) also reiterates this when she discusses how local languages can help students succeed throughout a lesson. Furthermore, Canagarajah (2013) discusses how translanguaging in academic writing can welcome the unique identities of students from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, as opposed to the 'stigmatization' these students can face for writing with a different voice and style. If the linguistic playing field is made more equal through translingual practices, then no matter what languages students bring into the classroom, all students can have a more equal chance for success, both in learning languages and having a positive sense of agency towards personal and societal challenges that lie ahead.

To conclude, what languages are best for schooling? The answer would not only be about identifying specific languages but also about accepting plurilingual realities and opening spaces for translanguaging.

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7

How social-emotional learning is integrated into the Vietnamese Language and Literature subject: A review from curriculum and textbooks to teachers' practices

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Abstract

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) plays a crucial role in fostering happy and successful individuals who potentially contribute to the overall well-being of society. SEL is not only found in stand-alone programs, but is also integrated into various subjects taught in school, including the mother language subject. Research indicates that mother language subjects bring a great advantage in developing students' socio-emotional competencies. This study examines the current implementation of SEL competencies in the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum, textbooks, and teaching practices and suggests that although SEL is not explicitly mentioned, several SEL competencies are integrated into the curriculum, from learning objectives and content to textbook design and teacher practices. However, because of the unintentional integration, some SEL indicators at high-order levels have been blurred and teaching SEL is spontaneous rather than systematic. Additionally, some SEL competencies receive inadequate attention. The study highlights the need to raise awareness about the importance of SEL, the role of national guidance, and

teacher training as key solutions for promoting SEL education in Vietnamese educational settings.

1 Introduction

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has become a widely recognized term in the field of education globally, as it supports students' well-being and success (Eklund et al., 2018; Zins & Elias, 2007). Rooted in research on resilience and prevention, SEL emerged in the mid-1990s with the publication of Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (1995) and Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (1993) (Zins, 2004). Since then, a growing body of literature has examined the concept and its integration into various aspects of education, particularly in K–12 schools. Regarding the benefits of SEL, educational researchers have formed a wide consensus that it positively impacts students' behaviors, attitudes, emotions, and even academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). In the long term, SEL can help predict the success of children, youth, and society (Davis et al., 2014). SEL is also seen as crucial for achieving the Targets of the Sustainable Development Goals established by UNESCO (Asah & Singh, 2019; Bryan, 2022), helping students to develop into responsible, empathetic, and productive citizens who can actively participate in addressing individual and global issues (Ferreira et al., 2020). Previous research has reported that SEL can be implemented as a stand-alone program but also can be integrated into subject curricula (Blyth, 2018; Blyth et al., 2018).

Several frameworks for SEL have been proposed, based on different approaches and contexts (Blyth, 2018; Blyth et al., 2018; Smart et al., 2022). At least 136 different SEL frameworks have been identified (Berg et al., 2017), including the National Research Council's 21st-Century Competencies (National Research Council, 2012), the National SEAD Commission framework (Aspen Commission, 2018), and the Big Five-Based Frameworks (John et al., 2008). Of these frameworks, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is one of the most widely used in

schools and institutions (Eklund et al., 2018). According to CASEL (2020), SEL is the process by which students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote positive identities, emotions, supportive relationships, and responsible decision-making. The CASEL framework consists of five areas: self-awareness (9 indicators), self-management (7 indicators), social awareness (8 indicators), relationship skills (9 indicators), and responsible decision-making (7 indicators). Each competence includes specific indicators that can be used as a reference in teaching and implementation in the classroom and school setting. In this paper, the authors use the CASEL framework (2020) to review and analyze the intersection of SEL and the Vietnamese language and literature subject.

It has been found that SEL can be integrated into most school subjects. Integrating it into language subjects, including Vietnamese language and literature, is believed to be a promising strategy due to the subject's features and contents, which make it well-suited for SEL adaptation (Marlatt, 2020; Storey, 2019). SEL can be incorporated into all modalities of language teaching (Storey, 2019), and a strong relationship exists between language teaching and SEL. Literature is not only an academic subject; it also explores values and life experiences. Language and literature are powerful tools for understanding and exploring ourselves and the world (Bruner, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1982). The relationship between SEL and the language subject is complex and multi-faceted, but there is limited research on how these two areas intersect in specific mother language subjects. Further examination of this field of research could enhance SEL implementation in actual classrooms. This paper provides an overview of the Vietnamese language and literature subject, analyzes the national language curriculum and textbooks, presents examples of SEL integration, and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of teacher practices. The paper concludes with a reflection on how to leverage the subject to achieve its full potential for SEL, including promising strategies, opportunities, and policy needs.

2 Integration of SEL in the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum

Literature has a long history in Vietnamese education, being considered the oldest subject (Do, 2011). Over the years, it has been heavily influenced by Confucian ideology, with a focus on literacy, memorization of the Five Classics and the Four Books, and the reading and composition of literature (Gardner, 1986; Do, 2011). In the late 19th century, Vietnam's education began to change, adopting modern Western approaches due to French colonial influences, followed by Soviet and U.S. influences (Huong & Fry, 2004).

Interestingly, the name of the subject 'Vietnamese and Literature' has undergone multiple changes over the years and across different school levels, including Vietnamese Literature, National Literature, and, simply, Vietnamese. Currently, based on its curriculum focus, the subject is referred to as Vietnamese language in primary schools and Vietnamese language and literature in secondary schools and in all levels of general education. Regardless of its name, the subject still has three main categories: Vietnamese language, literature, and text composition. Furthermore, across all levels, the curriculum has consistently upheld core values such as humanity, good manners, behaviors, and practical life skills (Do, 2011).

As mentioned above, it has been widely acknowledged that SEL can be integrated into various subjects, including Language arts. Research has also indicated that incorporating SEL into language subjects can have a positive impact on students' cultural identity and language proficiency (Lau & Shea, 2022). While there are ample opportunities for SEL integration in language arts, the level of integration is heavily influenced by the differing perspectives and approaches used in developing the language curriculum such as cultural lens and methodological approach.

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This can be observed in the case of the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum, which underwent a transformation after the 2018 educational renovation (MOET, 2018). The shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum resulted in significant progress in implementing SEL, as shown in Table 1.

	Vietnamese and Literature Curriculum (2006)	Vietnamese and Literature Curriculum (2018)
Features	• Content-based curriculum • Structured into three content strands: Knowledge of Vietnamese, Knowledge of Literature, and Knowledge of Composing Texts. For the elementary level, four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking were added. • Specified texts that students must learn • Most of the texts in the 2006 curriculum are literary texts • Reading, writing, listening, and speaking for primary school: Literacy and basic communication	• Competency-based curriculum • Structured into four language competencies for all school levels, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing • Only some required texts are specified, with the right of text selection given to textbook authors. • The proportion of text types in the 2018 curriculum is reasonably distributed, with an appropriate ratio of literary, informational, and argumentative texts. • For the first time, speaking and listening skills are given equal importance to reading and writing in the 2018 curriculum, especially for the secondary level.
SEL in the curriculum	**Vietnamese** Students are provided with knowledge of the Vietnamese language and communication principles, from which they can communicate and behave appropriately. **Literature** • Students understand, feel, and empathize with the situation, and the character's fate, learn good virtues, and criticize bad characteristics. • Students can analyze the situations of the characters to uncover the authors' messages and lessons **Composing texts** • Students practice different types of writing, such as descriptive, narrative, expressive, explanatory, and argumentative texts. From learning by model and practicing writing these types of texts, students have the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about issues in life and literature.	**Reading skills** • Students state their impressions of the texts and explore the authors' messages, thereby recognizing the authors' perspectives. • Students compare and connect their own experiences with text issues, expressing their attitudes of agreement or disagreement. **Writing skills** • Students write in different genres, emphasizing the expression of their own style and opinions. **Listening and speaking skills** • Students have more opportunities for social interaction and communication. They learn how to present ideas and give their personal opinions
General evaluation	• The 2018 curriculum offers more opportunities for developing students' socio-emotional competencies. The curriculum focuses on language skills and diversifies texts and activities, including social communication activities such as listening and speaking, thereby promoting students' socio-emotional development.	

• **Table 1**. Comparison of the incorporation of SEL in Vietnamese language and literature curriculum, 2006 and 2018

Vietnam's new curriculum was released in 2018 but its implementation was postponed until the 2020–21 school year due to preparation processes, including the composition of textbooks. Since the new competence-based curriculum began to be implemented, it has led to a more explicit integration of SEL into the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum. As shown in Table 2, the Vietnam language and literature curriculum promotes five qualities – patriotism, kindness, hard work, honesty,

and responsibility – and three general competencies – self-control and self-study, communication and cooperation, problem-solving and creativity – along with literacy and language competence as a subject competency. These qualities and competencies, which are in line with many frameworks of SEL competencies, are considered as goals to be achieved by all students.

The changes to the curriculum of Vietnamese language and literature create a supportive environment for SEL development. Table 1 shows that the new curriculum shifts the focus from teaching content to developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The inclusion of informational texts in the reading section and the emphasis on reading comprehension and its connection to real life helps students build literacy, vocabulary, and comprehension skills, thereby promoting a better understanding of diverse cultures and communities, empathy, and self-expression through various content strands. Writing in different genres and an emphasis on listening and speaking skills also contribute to developing effective communication skills, such as perspective-taking, building confidence, improving interpersonal relationships, and fostering self-awareness. In short, by changing the approach and perspective, the 2018 Vietnamese language and literature curriculum integrates SEL more effectively and naturally than the previous curriculum did.

Although SEL is not itself mentioned in the general or language arts curriculum, SEL indicators can be found implicitly and sometimes explicitly in the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum of 2018, with a strong alignment between SEL and the curriculum components, including the goals, content, pedagogy, and assessment.

Mission	• Acting as a foundation and aesthetic subject to impart precious cultural values, such as literature and national language, as well as healthy emotions, humane feelings, and benevolent and altruistic lifestyles.
	• Playing an important role in forming good qualities and core competencies for students, allowing them to live and work effectively and engage in lifelong learning.
	• Enhancing students' connection with their daily lives and providing them with the skills and knowledge required to effectively solve real-world problems.
	• Helping students communicate effectively, cultivating their literary and aesthetic competencies, and fostering their thoughts and feelings to become responsible citizens.
Objectives	• Cultivate main qualities such as patriotism, kindness, hard work, honesty, and responsibility; nurture the soul, personality, personal dreams, and aspirations.
	• Help students discover themselves and the world, understand people, have a rich spiritual life and develop a humanistic outlook and behavior; instill a love for Vietnamese language and literature; raise awareness of national origin and identity; preserve and develop Vietnamese cultural values; absorb the cultural quintessence of humanity and develop integrated competencies with the wide world.
	• Develop common competencies such as self-control and self-study, communication and cooperation, problem-solving and creativity, and specific competencies such as language and literary competencies.
Pedagogy	• Develop integrated and differentiated teaching; utilize a variety of teaching methods such as expressive reading, role-playing, storytelling, problem-based teaching, acting performances, Q&A sessions, worksheets, learning diaries, group work, discussion, drawing, making movies, dialogue, lecture, problem-solving, debate, presentation, etc.
Assessment	• Assess students regularly and continuously, using a combination of teacher assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment.
	• Some examples of assessment methods include tests, observations, daily notes, presentations, feedback, reports, and learning products such as projects and exercises.

• **Table 2**. An overview of the 2018 Vietnamese language and literature curriculum

The integration of SEL into the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum can be seen to naturally promote students' personal and social development. The mission and objectives of the subject are well aligned with all five of CASEL's SEL competencies. It aims to cultivate students' healthy emotions, humane feelings, benevolent and altruistic lifestyles, as well as nurture their soul, personality, personal dreams, and aspirations to enable them to live and work effectively for lifelong learning. In addition, emphasizing an integrated and differentiated pedagogy through a variety of teaching methods helps to meet diverse needs and promote personal and social development. Expressive reading, role-playing, and storytelling can help students to develop empathy, emotional regulation, and relationship skills by experiencing different perspectives and emotions. Problem-based teaching, debate, and presentation and acting performances can foster critical thinking, decision-making, and communication skills. Q&A sessions, worksheets, and learning diaries can encourage reflection and self-awareness. Group work, discussion, and dialogue can foster teamwork, collaboration, and communication skills that can help students to express themselves and learn from others.

Although the Vietnamese language and literature curriculum provides comprehensive support for SEL development, the analysis of the curriculum indicates a disparity in the competencies. In particular, the competencies of self-awareness and social awareness are emphasized more explicitly in the curriculum due to the alignment with the learning contents. For example, students are required to understand, feel, empathize with situations and characters' fates, learn good qualities, criticize bad habits and personalities, learn about social issues through informational texts, and practice communication skills through listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In contrast, relationship management and responsible decision-making receive less attention and remain unclear. This imbalance and lack of comprehensiveness in SEL may lead to ineffective SEL education for school students. These competencies could

therefore be addressed by incorporating them into textbook materials and through instructional strategies.

In conclusion, the natural integration of SEL into the curriculum has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that SEL is implemented in a seamless manner, without requiring separate programs, and can be promoted in daily teaching and learning activities. However, the disadvantage is the resulting lack of comprehensiveness and balance in SEL education. This lack should be addressed to ensure that all SEL competencies are fully developed in students.

3   The role of Vietnamese and literature textbooks in promoting SEL

Textbooks play a crucial role in delivering the curriculum to actual practitioners. Scholars have recognized that textbooks serve as agents of change, influencing the learning process (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Gak, 2011). For students and teachers in low- and middle-income countries, textbooks are often considered the primary resource for teaching and learning, making their importance even greater (Okpala et al., 2001). Reviewing these textbooks can provide insight into how SEL is being presented.

Based on the national curriculum, publishers will create textbooks according to its content, achieved standards and all requirements. The elements of SEL are presented in Vietnamese language and literature textbooks through a system of corpus, questions/exercises, activities, and learning tasks. With the introduction of the 2018 curriculum, the policy of 'one curriculum, many sets of textbooks' replaced the previous policy of using only one set of textbooks for the entire country. As of 2022, three sets of textbooks – *The Kite, Connecting Knowledge to Real Life*, and *Creative Horizons* – are available for grades 1–3 (primary school), grades 6–7 (middle school), and grade 10 (high school), thereby providing teachers and students with a wider range of learning resources.

The new Vietnamese Language textbooks offer many opportunities for promoting SEL. The diverse range of topics, including self, family, school, nature, country, profession, and community, provides students with opportunities to practice SEL in various contexts. Additionally, the new textbooks have increased the proportion of informative texts relevant to students' lives, from 4 or 5% in the old textbook sets to around 30% in the new sets. This allows students to approach real-life situations for more effective SEL education. An example of the themes in *The Kite* for grade 2 is provided below.

1st term (18 weeks)	2nd term (17 weeks)
Theme: I am a young bamboo (I am growing)	W 19. Friends in the house
	W 20. Bonding with people
W 1. Life around me	**Theme: I love nature**
W 2. My time	W 21. Green lungs
W 3. My friends	W 22. The story of trees and people
W 4. I love my friends	W 23. The world of birds
W 5. My second house	W 24. Little friends
W 6. I love my school	W 25. The world of green forest
W 7. My teachers	W 26. Living together with all species
W 8. I love my teachers	W 27. Second mid-term review
W 9. First mid-term review	W 28. The seasons of the year
W 10. Enjoying school	W 29. People and nature
W 11. Studying hard and well	**Theme: I love my fatherland Vietnam**
Theme: I'm at home	W 30. My hometown
W 12. The circle of love	W 31. Loving my hometown
W 13. Loving and respecting grandparents	W 32. Vietnamese people
W 14. Parents' merits and love	W 33. People around us
W 15. Being a good child	W 34. Vietnamese children
W 16. Getting along with siblings	W 35. Year-end review
W 17. Having siblings	
W 18. First term review	

● **Table 3.** Themes and topics in the Vietnamese grade 2 textbook (*The Kite*)

● **Figure 1.** 'Friendship Award' reading lesson in grade 1 textbook (term 2) – *Connecting Knowledge to Real Life*

Reviewing the lessons in the textbook reveals that SEL competencies are effectively integrated into the themes of the lessons. The textbooks promote self-awareness and self-management, including activities and tasks related to personal topics that help students understand their own characteristics and role in the world. Additionally, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are emphasized in lessons focusing on social and life topics that require students to understand social norms and issues, thereby developing their life skills. The textbooks for Vietnamese language and literature provide a wide range of texts, giving students multiple contexts to explore themselves and the world, expand their knowledge, familiarize themselves with different situations, and develop their skills. As students progress to higher grades, the context becomes broader and more complex, encompassing not just familiar settings such as home, family, school, and community, but also workplaces and other communities. Context-based learning enables students

to acquire social and emotional competencies more naturally and effectively. By experiencing different scenarios through role-playing and other activities, students are able to draw lessons and skills that they can apply in their lives. In the following sections, we will examine how SEL is integrated into the textbooks by analyzing screenshots from the basic education level.

Reading

The reading lesson in Figure 1 is designed for first graders and features a story about the friendship between two friends – a deer and a roe deer – who compete in a running competition. By reading the story aloud with expression and engaging in comprehension activities, students can identify with the characters and learn important lessons about kindness, helping others, and empathy. This lesson promotes SEL competencies, including: 1) self-awareness, such as the integration of personal and social identities and the recognition of one's emotions when making decisions between helping others or winning a race; 2) social awareness, such as considering others' perspectives and demonstrating empathy when observing a friend struggling in a difficult situation; 3) self-management, such as identifying and using stress-management strategies and showing the courage to take the initiative when choosing to stop running to help a friend; 4) relationship skills, such as developing positive relationships, and standing up for the rights of others by prioritizing their health and well-being over rewards; and 5) responsible decision-making, including identifying solutions to personal and social problems and making informed judgments when deciding to accompany an injured friend.

This reading lesson model is used across all grades, with subject matter and level of difficulty expanding as students progress through the grades. In secondary education, students are expected not only to identify the text's artistic features and understand the characters' situation, but also to provide their own assessments and opinions. They are also encouraged to connect the text to real

Figure 2. 'Bullying' reading lesson in grade 6 (term 1) – Connecting Knowledge to Real Life

life situations and explore appropriate behaviors and decision-making strategies. For example, in grade 6, the theme of friendship is explored in a more complex and contradictory context (that of bullying). Students are asked to provide explanations and solutions for more complex, conflict-ridden situations (Figure 2).

Vietnamese and literature textbooks have the potential to promote students' SEL through advanced reading comprehension questions. By asking questions such as 'What did you do when you were in a situation involving bullying? How can the poem change the way you deal with bullying?' at the end of a lesson, students can develop higher level SEL competencies. For example, they can analyze complex social situations related to bullying among friends, connect with their self-worth, manage their behaviors, and learn how to build healthy relationships to avoid bullying and being bullied. With their combination of rich content and active teaching methods, Vietnamese and literature lessons in textbooks are therefore well positioned to facilitate SEL.

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Writing

The writing component of Vietnamese and literature lessons also plays a significant role in developing students' social-emotional competencies. Students learn to express their self-perceptions and awareness with increasing complexity through narrative writing (events), expressive writing (emotions), and descriptive writing (characteristics) at the primary level, and explanatory (understanding and knowledge) and argumentative/persuasive writing (opinions, perspectives) at the secondary level. Each writing modality provides students with the opportunity to express their perceptions and demonstrate their socio-emotional competencies. The following examples illustrate two different forms of writing at different levels.

As shown in Figure 3, the second-grade students are tasked with writing narrative sentences to introduce themselves. To successfully complete this assignment, they must first self-evaluate and understand their own unique characteristics and preferences. By the time they reach sixth grade, the tasks become more complex and require them to connect personal experiences and knowledge with real-life situations and to express their feelings, judgments, and opinions. For example, students are asked to write about their most memorable experience or to give their perspective on a life
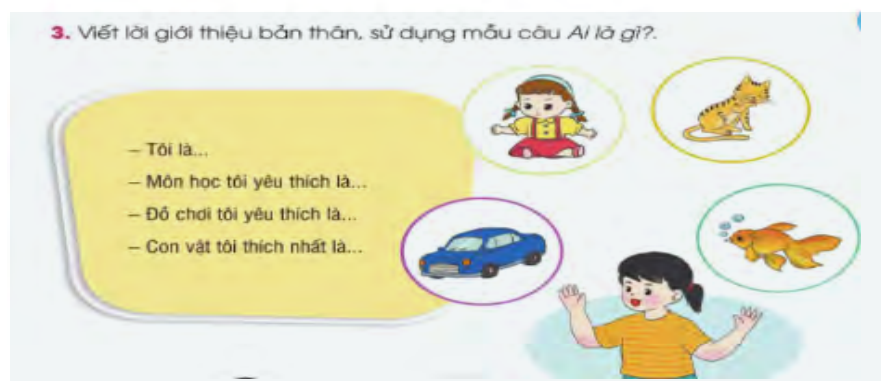
● **Figure 3.** 'Introducing yourself' writing lesson in grade 2 (term 1) – *The Kite*

'Overcoming fear', grade 1 (term 2, p. 25) – *Creative Horizons*

'The two goats', grade 1 (term 1, p. 10) – *The Kite*

● **Figure 4.** Listening and speaking lessons (grade 1)

phenomenon or a statement, such as 'Many people believe that everyone should have a pet. What is your opinion on this matter?' In this instance, students must demonstrate their understanding of the responsibilities and values associated with owning a pet. The textbook provides a set of guiding questions to support students to develop problem-solving and writing skills, thereby promoting their self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making abilities.

Listening and speaking

Listening and speaking have their rightful roles in the new curriculum and textbooks. These language strands also show certain advantages in SEL education. Listening and speaking lessons provide students with opportunities to clearly express themselves, engage in discussions with others, express agreement or disagreement, elicit others' feelings and ideas, thereby developing social-emotional capacities.The above pictures were captured from storytelling lessons for first graders. The lessons required students to listen to stories and answer questions. In 'The two goats' lesson, students are asked questions including, 'What did the two goats want to do? What did they say? What happened in the middle of the bridge? What were the results?' Through this lesson, students learn about conventions, social order, and the importance of cooperation in solving problems. In another lesson, 'Overcoming fear', students listen to the story of a character named Lien and her journey to overcome her fear of climbing. By finding answers, students gained insight into the character's difficulties and emotions and how she resolved problems through bravery, determination, and the encouragement and support of others.

In higher grade levels, lessons are more interactive and require students to take an active role in discussing controversial issues. For example, a Vietnamese and Literature textbook for grade 6 (*The Kite*, term 2, p. 81) provides exercises that challenge the students to discuss complex topics such as 'Should we play video games?' and 'How do we behave in a dilemma?' Additionally, the *Creative Horizons* textbook (term 2, p. 39) for seventh grade has lessons that teach students how to communicate constructively and respect differences on controversial issues and how to participate in group discussions. A grade 10 Vietnamese language and literature textbook (*The Kite*, term 2, p. 81) includes a task on a social issue, where students have to express their thoughts on taking responsibility, overcoming difficulties, and admitting blame and blaming others. In these listening and speaking lessons, students not only retell the stories but also engage in active discussions. They must synthesize literary and real-life knowledge, express their personal opinions, and respect and reconcile different perspectives in interactive speaking and listening activities.

In general, Vietnamese language and literature textbooks have many bright spots in developing students' SEL competencies, such as a system of topics and exercises associated with SEL topics. However, it can be seen that the textbooks primarily focus on providing language materials and a system of questions and exercises, rather than on providing operational systems and activities to develop competencies, including SEL. As a result, the effectiveness of using these textbooks will largely depend on the creativity and capacity of teachers in utilizing and organizing related activities. In addition, some higher-level SEL skills, such as decision-making and self-management, are not thoroughly addressed. Thus, it is important to focus not only on the content, but also on the teaching methods to ensure a comprehensive and balanced approach to SEL education.

4   Analysis of teaching practices for implementing SEL

According to CASEL (2020), teaching methods play a crucial role in developing SEL in students. Research has shown that active learning and teaching approaches can effectively foster the development of SEL skills (Durlak et al., 2011). In Vietnam, the methods for teaching Vietnamese language and literature effectively have long attracted significant concern. Teaching and assessment in this subject have been uniform and lacking in creativity, relying heavily on rote memorization and repetition (Do, 2011; Pham & Nguyen, 2022). This method of teaching and assessment has been found to have a negative impact on students' thinking and creativity. In the past, writing to repeat learned knowledge and writing about learned literary texts were the primary forms of assessment (Do, 2022). However, since 2014, reading comprehension and persuasive writing have been incorporated

into Vietnamese language and literature examinations. Despite the supportive curriculum and textbooks, the effectiveness of SEL is still being affected by teachers' traditional pedagogy.

Recognizing these limitations, the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has implemented several strategies to support teachers and promote change. These strategies include issuing official documents guiding the innovation of teaching methods, providing teacher training, and organizing seminars. The most recent initiatives include a national conference on innovation in teaching and assessing the Vietnamese language and literature subject (MOET, 2022c), the issuance of Official Dispatch 3175/BGĐT-GDTrH (MOET, 2022a), and Enhancing Teacher Education Program (ETEP) with nine modules (MOET, 2022b). The above activities are aimed at guiding Vietnamese language and literature teachers to innovate their teaching and assessment methods toward developing students' competencies. While there has been some improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in Vietnamese language and literature, many aspects still require further discussion and solutions. This section will analyze the teaching process and practices to evaluate how SEL is implemented in actual Vietnamese language and literature classes.

Under the guidance of MOET (2021a,b), most lessons in all subjects, including Vietnamese language and literature, now follow a 5-step teaching process: 1) Introduction, 2) Discovering new knowledge, 3) Practice, 4) Application, and 5) Summary. These five steps support teachers to innovate active teaching methods, which in turn contribute to the development of students' SEL competencies. The introduction or warm-up stage offers students opportunities to engage in self-awareness and self-reflection activities, preparing them for new lessons and fostering a positive learning attitude. During the 'discovering new knowledge' stage, students can enhance their social awareness and relationship skills through group discussions and collaborative activities as they analyze and form new knowledge. The 'practice' stage encourages self-management and responsible decision-making as students

use their newfound knowledge to receive or create texts. In the 'application' stage, students have the chance to further develop their self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness skills by connecting their new knowledge and skills with their own lives. The final 'summary' stage, which includes summarizing the lesson and assigning homework, supports responsible decision-making and goal-setting skills as students reflect on their learning and plan for future progress. However, some teachers note that the rigid adherence to teaching steps hinders creativity and leads to boredom among both teachers and students (Ho, 2022).

Given the advantages of promoting SEL in the curriculum and textbooks, language teachers have strong advantages in achieving the goals of SEL. In language classrooms, SEL can be developed through instructional strategies. These competencies are promoted via activities such as Q & A, self-reflection, and role-playing, from which students can draw lessons about relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

Based on the results of 20 classroom observations, a study (VNIES, 2021) indicated that Vietnamese language and literature teachers employ a mixture of traditional and modern teaching methods in their classes. Utilizing diverse methods can provide students with a range of learning experiences that cater to students' needs, thereby developing many SEL competencies (Van & Janssen, 2019). However, the studies show that activities such as lectures, individual work, and doing worksheets, as well as taking notes in class, are frequently used, while interactive activities such as presentations, problem-based teaching, role-playing, and debating are used less frequently (Ho, 2022; Pham & Nguyen, 2022). In reading comprehension, the lecture method is employed more often than in other areas. These practices can affect the effectiveness in developing students' SEL competencies: traditional, lecture-based teaching methods have been found to be less effective in promoting SEL (Durlak et al., 2011). Furthermore, when giving feedback, teachers often focus on correct/incorrect answers rather than providing comments on students' actions and performance.

The learning environment is also not highly supportive and democratic, with teachers focusing on maintaining class discipline, requiring students to listen and remain silent, and with students rarely sharing their opinions or asking questions. This highlights the need to promote active teaching methods and foster a positive learning environment to enhance the quality of SEL education in Vietnamese language and literature.

Teaching practices play a crucial role in shaping the learning environment and achieving SEL educational goals. While Vietnamese language and literature teachers employ a range of teaching methods, there is a need to further strengthen interactive teaching methods and improve the learning environment to encourage student engagement and foster the development of SEL competencies.

5 Conclusion and future recommendations

It is widely accepted that SEL can pave the way for students' better academic learning and well-being and enhance their school and life success (Zins, 2004). It can be promoted through stand-alone programs as well as integrated subject programs. Evidence suggests that promoting SEL in language arts, such as English or Vietnamese language and literature, is a practical and effective educational approach (Storey, 2019).

This study, based on an analysis of the curriculum, textbooks, and teaching practices, aimed to examine the level and effectiveness of SEL implementation in the Vietnamese language and literature subject. The findings reveal that although the curriculum does not explicitly mention SEL, some SEL competencies are evident in the content related to self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies align well with the goals of the Vietnamese language and literature subject, promoting values and qualities such as love, compassion, empathy, responsibility, good communication skills, and harmonious relationships. The textbooks also support

SEL through a rich and diverse corpus system, providing students with a wide range of contexts for self-discovery and exploration of the wider world. In the classroom, activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and presentations support the development of social-emotional competencies.

However, integrating SEL into the Vietnamese language and literature subject also has its limitations. The natural integration of SEL into the curriculum and textbook may not cover all essential SEL competencies, mainly in the domains of self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The non-systematic approach to SEL leads to an imbalance in teaching essential SEL competencies, which may affect its overall effectiveness. In addition, teachers' awareness and practices in teaching SEL are limited. The research shows that SEL is taught primarily through the lens of learning content, leading to a focus on qualities, knowledge, and awareness rather than skills or action competencies. Traditional teaching methods such as rote memorization, template learning, and lecturing are still frequently used, while active methods that promote SEL competencies are not given adequate attention. Furthermore, the classroom atmosphere is not always friendly and open-minded, and classroom activities do not always encourage student self-expression and peer interaction.

Based on the above advantages and disadvantages, several solutions and recommendations are proposed to promote and improve the effectiveness of SEL teaching in Vietnamese language and literature. Firstly, to address the imbalanced integration of SEL in the curriculum, there is a need for compensatory solutions, such as the creation of guidelines for SEL implementation, with a focus on the missing components of SEL competencies. This can help to highlight the less-explored aspects of SEL and make SEL education more comprehensive and practical. Such limitations can be overcome if teachers are well-trained and equipped with the necessary skills to effectively exploit all SEL ideas expressed in the curriculum and textbooks, and to nurture other SEL competencies through active teaching methods. Hence, the key solution is to

raise awareness and provide training for teachers. The training should focus on understanding the SEL competencies and the forms and methods used to promote them. In general, promoting active teaching methods and teacher training is crucial in effectively supporting the implementation of SEL and competencies development in general.

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8

Integrating Social and Emotional Learning into literacy programs

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Abstract

Room to Read's comprehensive early grade literacy program focuses on developing the habit and love for reading. During COVID-19, we pivoted and adapted our programs in response to the pandemic. At the same time, we recognized the stress that children were going through and integrated Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into literacy initiatives. In this paper, we look at the journey and process of integrating SEL into literacy resources and activities. We start with the importance of students' social and emotional well-being and how literacy and SEL blend well together. We then describe the range of opportunities in the Literacy Program for integrating SEL. We also reflect on the feedback collected from some of our key stakeholders. Finally, there are insights and lessons learned that can be useful for other organizations doing similar work.

Global education goals

SDG Target 4.7 envisages education that is holistic and encompasses various dimensions of sustainable development. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is critical for understanding of rights, equality, and the appreciation of diversity. Self-awareness, the ability to engage meaningfully with others, and an understanding of systemic issues is required for building knowledge and skills around the themes listed in this global education target.

In this context, Room to Read initiated the process of integrating SEL into its early grade literacy program. Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, Room to Read works in more than 15 countries to create a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality. This aim is being achieved by providing support during the two most critical time periods in a child's education: primary school for literacy acquisition and secondary school for girls' education. Room to Read's Literacy Program trains and coaches teachers of first and second grade in literacy instruction, creates high quality books and curricular materials in local languages, and establishes children's libraries filled with diverse books that can be enjoyed at school or home. The literacy program focuses on children in low-income communities who most need these educational interventions. We partner with local communities, governments, and the publishing industry to test and implement innovative models that help children learn to read and develop a love of reading.[1]

Rationale for integrating SEL into Literacy Programs

Social and emotional well-being is the basis for all learning, including academic and other aspects of education and personal development. Emotional awareness and social skills, the ability to cooperate and collaborate with others, and the ability to deal constructively with conflicts are important for meaningful learning and education. Nobel-prize winning economist Dr James Heckman, who advocates for the inclusion of life skills in education, cites research indicating that success in life depends on these skills, which are as important as performance on cognitive aptitude tests (Heckman & Katuz, 2012).

[1] For more information, visit: https://www.roomtoread.org/

Blending SEL and literacy is a natural fit. Stories have been used for as long as language has existed to create and communicate culture, to transmit moral messages, and to teach children lessons about life. Because of this, researchers Fisher and Frey (2019) conclude that literacy is the content area most strongly suited to SEL integration. Other researchers have looked at the connections between literacy development and social emotional development and found that they are neurologically and biologically intertwined. In literacy as well as in social-emotional learning there is a benefit in providing support for this learning during the early years of development. Students develop their social emotional capabilities in very similar ways to how they acquire their literacy skills: through experience and exploration, and through repeated exposure in multiple contexts, during social interactions with others, through observation, and through receiving feedback from the more 'literate' adults around them. Both literacy and social-emotional competency include skill sets that can be widely applied across all areas of life.

At Room to Read, we recognize that emotional regulation is a key skill for success in life – both professional and personal. Our work is based on research that shows that social emotional well-being leads to higher academic achievements. Learning happens in the context of relationships, especially for young children. It is best to start SEL early, which is why our early grade literacy program provides a good platform to get started on introducing some of the SEL core competencies.

CASEL describes SEL as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes 'to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.' [2]

2   https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#the-casel-5

- **Figure 1:** The CASEL framework

In the CASEL framework, the five SEL learning competencies are:

- *Self-awareness*: Recognizing one's emotions, values, strengths, challenges, and how they influence behavior
- *Self-management*: Managing emotions, thoughts, and behavior, and achieving goals and aspirations
- *Social awareness*: Showing understanding and empathy for others
- *Responsible decision-making*: Making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions
- *Relationship skills*: Establishing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships

These are often spoken about in the context of crisis responses, since there is growing awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on well-being and academic success. However, all

children need to develop SEL skills to learn and thrive in society. Emotion drives attention and attention drives learning. Emotion also affects how we process and store new information. It provides a context for the information that is presented to us. From this perspective, *all* children (and adults) need to develop SEL skills to learn and thrive.

Room to Read's journey

Room to Read's journey of integrating SEL into the literacy program started with developing our own understanding of SEL. In early 2020, the author went through a training workshop by Social, Emotional and Ethical (SEE) Learning India and Emory University in the U.S. It was an intensive four-day workshop for educators to understand the pedagogical model, framework, and research informing the SEE Learning curriculum, which included hands-on practice to foster the development of competencies around self, social, and systems awareness. The workshop equipped educators to integrate SEL in the school setting and take forward the learning experiences in their classrooms.

Room to Read has a global literacy team, of which I am a part, which supports colleagues in country offices who implement the program in different regions across the world. After the SEE Learning training, we provided an orientation on SEL for the global literacy colleagues. We also oriented colleagues in the country offices on integrating SEL in the early grade literacy program.

Increase of relevance during COVID

The initial integration of SEL into the literacy program coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent school closures across the world, which affected around 1.6 billion children (UNICEF, 2020). Disconnection from peers, physical distancing, and restricted movement were some of the realities that children experienced in their daily lives. These unavoidable circumstances put children at risk for stress, confusion, anxiety, and a feeling of helplessness that inhibited their regular learning. Children in low-income communities, such as those we work with, were at a higher risk of mental health issues, as they faced a range of challenges from financial crisis to health and safety issues. For example, during the lockdown, Childline (a helpline for children) in India noted a 50% spike in calls related to violence, abuse and exploitation of children (UNICEF, 2020). We already know that mental health and learning are closely connected. Research suggests that persistent fear and anxiety result in limited attention span, short-term and long-term memory loss, and inhibit the ability to learn and interact socially (Centre on the Developing Child, 2010).

SEL is relevant at all times and in all contexts. It became even more important during COVID. In response to the school closures, we pivoted and adapted our programs, including integrating SEL components into them. Globally, we developed and filmed read-alouds based on our high-quality books for early grades. These videos were uploaded on Literacy Cloud and other digital platforms, such as government websites in the countries where we work. In addition, the videos were also circulated amongst parents and teachers by phone.

Because the low-income communities that we work with have limited digital access, we continued our efforts to reach them through hard-copy materials. In many locations, we developed literacy kits including books, story cards, literacy worksheets, and stationery, and distributed these to children in program areas.

During the pandemic, the children spent a lot of time at home. The parents' role in continuing the education of their children became more prominent than ever. We developed parents' handbooks and calendars and distributed them in rural communities. We also developed audio resources such as stories and literacy games that parents could access through simple phones. We also reached children and parents at scale in low-income communities through multiple programs over TV and radio. These

Recognizing and Managing Emotions: Teaching Students How to Handle their Feelings				
Title	**Country**	**Author**	**Illustrator**	**Blurb**
When I am Happy	Jordan	Hiyam Abu Adas	Haya Halaw	What makes you happy? One young boy shows us the things that make him happy; from the breakfast his mother prepares each morning to playing with his friends after school. But what makes him happiest of all?
Salma and the Orange Trees	Jordan	Haya Mansour	Gada Jermy	Salma misses her home country. She especially misses her orange tree. So Salma draws one, and the oranges become all kinds of things that cheer her up: drums, balloons, even a clown! What else can an orange be?
Words That Burn	Philippines	Raymond Garlitos	Beth Parrocha	Hurtful words are always raining down on Anita. One day, she just couldn't stop herself from saying hurtful words to others too. What will one of her friends say that surprises Anita?
Goodbye Puti	Philippines	Jomike Tejido	Jomike Tejido	A girl has always played with Puti, her beloved dog. One day Puti runs into the forest. The girl finds the hiding place of Puti and is shocked by what she sees. Did something happen to her pet dog?
I Am Happy to Be Me	Philippines	Zarah Gagatiga	Jamie Bauza	Smily, playful, happy to do whatever she wants. That's Tere. But why is she always being laughed at by her classmates?
Read Me Now	China	Zhen Zhen	Wang Xiaoxu	A boy writes letters to his father every day. Little monsters appear inside his unread letters. What will happen to the little monsters when father begins to read his letters?
My Elastical Fantastical Bubble	US	Krystal Song	Katherine Ahmed	Hong-Yee loves her bubble. Most of the time she likes to be in her bubble with just herself. But what will happen if she changes her bubble? Will it pop? Can she still be herself?

● **Table 1.** Examples of Room to Read titles that promote self-awareness

included a children's show with video read-alouds of stories, radio programs on reading, and literacy activities that parents could do with children at home.

These initiatives were at two levels – some global initiatives have been implemented across the organization in all the countries where Room to Read works. There are also country-specific initiatives that were relevant to the context of that country. This paper will look at both.

Global initiatives

SEL-themed books

In all the countries where we work, Room to Read develops and prints high-quality books in local languages for young children. As part of our work on SEL, we developed books that cater to different aspects of social and emotional learning. These were also shared on our global literacy platform, Literacy Cloud (literacycloud.org). Below is a snapshot of some of the books, which cater to the theme of recognizing and managing emotions. Similarly, we have books which touch upon problem-solving, perseverance, and positive relationships in terms of interacting with others in respectful and kind ways. These map to the CASEL competency areas of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills.

SEL-themed questions for read-alouds

The read-aloud process is social. During shared reading, an interaction takes place between the author, the story itself (characters), the reader, and the listeners. Listeners may be attuned to the pictures in the story, the facial expressions and tone of the reader, and the words of the story. Stories are more effective for holding student attention and for building interest and engagement when they involve emotional salience communicated through tone of voice, pacing, pitch, volume, eye contact with the reader,

Competency / skill area	• Self-awareness
Definition	• The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behavior across contexts
Indicators that this skill is less fully developed	• Acting out aggressively to express one's feelings • Feelings of low self-esteem or confusion • Being unable to identify one's likes, dislikes, strengths, and areas for growth
Indicators that this skill is more fully developed	• Recognizing and naming feelings • Knowing one's strengths and experiencing self-efficacy • Understanding and naming key aspects of one's identity
How to practice this skill during read-alouds	• Identifying and naming feelings • Identifying one's preferences and strengths • Reflecting on one's own identities, experiences, thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, etc.

● **Table 2:** Using read-alouds to promote self-awareness

pauses, and facial expressions. We can use emotions to direct students' attention to the reading process and we can encourage students to make personal connections to the text. We can also engage children in perspective-taking and empathetic responses as we raise their awareness about ways of being and living that are different from their own. We can use read-alouds to help students consider solutions to problems they may have or may encounter in the future. In short, there are plenty of opportunities to engage students in SEL during read-alouds – and in doing so, increase their emotional connection to reading and to exploring their own, and others' experiences and identities.

Table 2 illustrates what this implies for the competency area of self-awareness:

SEL can be integrated into read-alouds using questions that invite students to practice skills in each of the five SEL competency

areas. Students can be invited to share their responses aloud during the story reading. Following the read-aloud, the questions can also be used to engage students in small group discussions and writing assignments.

With the help of a consultant on each of the SEL skill areas, we developed a question bank. For example, to foster development in self-awareness, we can ask students to reflect on their own experiences, thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, values, etc. Some questions from the area of self-awareness are:

1. How do you think the character felt when (name an event from the story)? Why do you think s/he felt that way? How would you have felt if that same thing happened to you?
2. What feelings do you notice in your body when you feel (name an emotion)?
3. What do you have in common with (name a character)?
4. How are you different from (name a character)?
5. What strength does (name of a character) have that you want to develop? What are some of your strengths?

There are similar questions for each of the SEL competency areas used with relevant books during read-alouds, so that children can start developing a vocabulary and language for exploring emotions. We developed read-aloud videos based on our titles, which were shared digitally on different platforms.

Contextualized examples from Country Offices

In addition to the global initiatives, the countries where Room to Read works incorporated SEL into their literacy programs, according to their needs and context. Since this overlapped with COVID, most country offices integrated SEL into the Literacy Pivots that they were undertaking. The objective was to reach teachers and parents as well as students, so that the adults around the children could support this process.

Children	Parents	Teachers
• Children's literature: a tool to build SEL • Worksheets • Combination of worksheets and stories • Integration in book development process (new SEL-themed titles were developed)	• Nudges/messaging to parents (Room to Read provided nudges and messages to parents either directly or through teachers, with tips on how to support literacy and SEL while children were at home) • Support material for parents (including worksheets in contexts where they could be distributed)	• Sensitize teachers and educators on the significance of SEL

● **Table 3:** SEL integration in Literacy Pivot initiatives during COVID

Children

Room to Read works with government schoolteachers from grades 1 and 2 on literacy instruction and provides pupils' books to students to practice reading and literacy skills. During COVID, we developed SEL-focused literacy worksheets for children that could be distributed while they were at home and during cyclic school closures when schools reopened in-between the COVID waves. These included specific activities to incorporate SEL. Below are sections of the worksheets that support different SEL competencies:[3]

After reading a short story, children in Sri Lanka answer questions to help assess their comprehension levels. Two questions support SEL:

● *How did Kavisha feel when she lost her pencil?*
● *Have you helped your friend when she/he was in trouble? How did you feel?*

3   Room to Read Bangladesh developed a remedial package in collaboration with the government to help mitigate learning loss during COVID.

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1. පැන්සල නැති වුණේ කාගෙ ද?...............
2. ගුරුතුමිය පටන් ගත්තේ මොකක් ද?.............
3. කවිෂාට පැන්සලක් දුන්නේ කවුද?...............
4. පැන්සල නැති වුණාම කවිෂාට දැනුණේ කොහොම ද?
5. ඔබත් යාළුවෙක් කරදරයකට පත් වූ විට උදවු කරන්න කැමතියි ද? අකමැතියි ද?
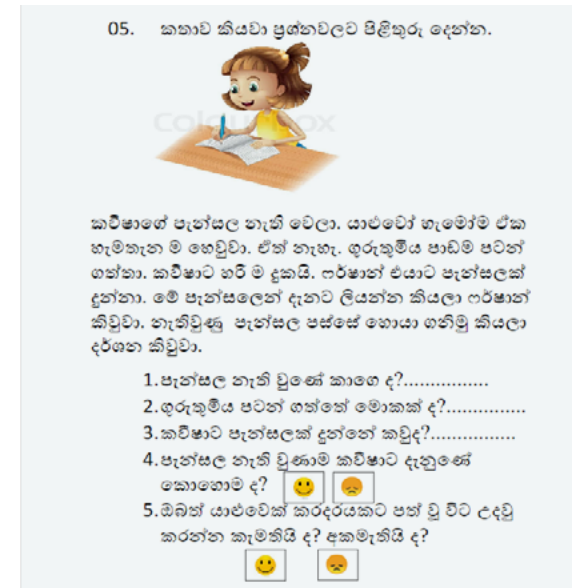
● **Figure 2.** Bangladesh grade 1 worksheet: *How are you feeling today? Talk to your friend about your feeling and reason for that feeling.*

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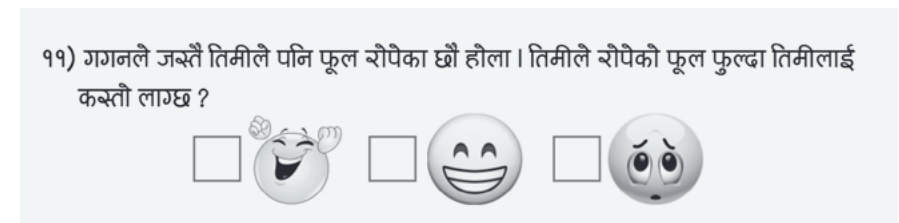
● **Figure 3.** Nepal grade 1 worksheet: *Gagan felt happy when he planted a plant in a pot. How do you feel when you sow a plant?*

৫. ছবি দেখে অভিনয় করে দেখাই
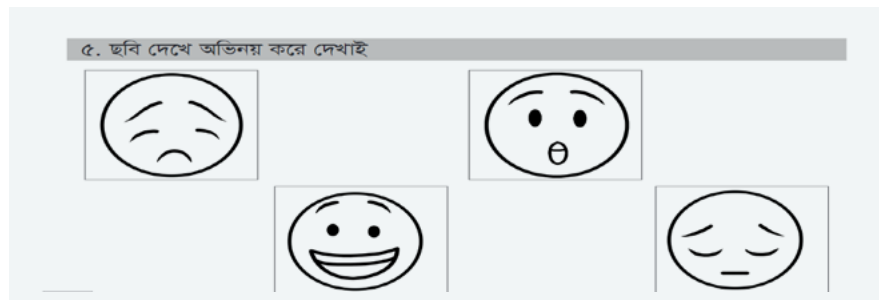
Figure 4. Sri Lanka grade 2 worksheet to develop SEL skills of self-awareness, relationship building and decision-making

Parents and teachers

SEL-related activities used a combination of audio and video messaging for parents, teachers, and teacher educators, supported by the training of government officials and teachers on the power of children's stories to support SEL development. The audio/video messaging provided tips to parents and teachers regarding different ways through which they could engage with children during COVID, through stories and songs, involve them in the daily activities and learn by observing the world around them. These activities helped parents and children to feel connected and mitigated some of the stress that families experienced during the lockdown. Worksheets, along with guided audiovisual support for parents, helped children to express their emotions through different activities.

A handbook was designed for parents to facilitate greater parent engagement and promote the home as a space for learning. The handbook suggests activities to support SEL at home: for example, setting up a time to sit together for recreational activities such as narrating as well as creating collective stories; suggesting seasonal and festival songs; and explaining how the joy of singing, dancing, and narrating stories together improves relationships and supports children's well-being.

Figure 5. A parents' handbook in India

Sensitizing teachers and educators in Sri Lanka

Room to Read Sri Lanka oriented teachers and government personnel on the need for SEL, especially during COVID and beyond. The Sri Lanka Sinhala team organized three rounds of online orientation on SEL for teachers, government Inservice Advisors, and Regional Directors. Around 300 teachers and government officials participated. Additionally, worksheets with SEL components were shared with the participants to explain how SEL can be incorporated in regular activities for reading and writing.

Teacher training videos

Room to Read Bangladesh developed a training video to sensitize teachers on SEL. The video provides an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health and learning, the significance of SEL, experts' perspective on children's socioemotional well-being, and practices to support SEL in schools.[4]

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4   The video is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeaOrroFqh0
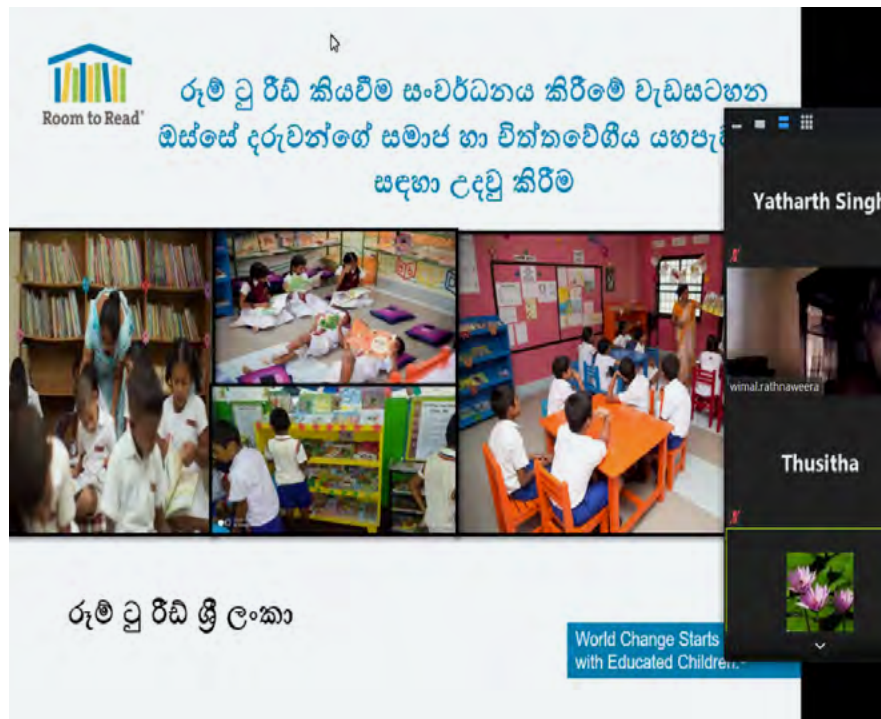
Figure 6. Online orientation for government teachers and officials on SEL in Sri Lanka

Brief qualitative study

Parents as well as teachers contributed significantly to the implementation of SEL-integrated pivot activities. The parents provided crucial support to children's learning at home, which the teachers facilitated by distributing content, orienting parents, and providing guidance on supporting learning at home. We conducted a small qualitative study on the views of parents and teachers regarding the efficacy of pivot initiatives in supporting SEL. The focus was to understand the experiences of teachers, parents, and caregivers on supporting children's socioemotional well-being, using a case study approach. The methodology was to conduct phone interviews with 17 parents and 16 teachers/field staff, who
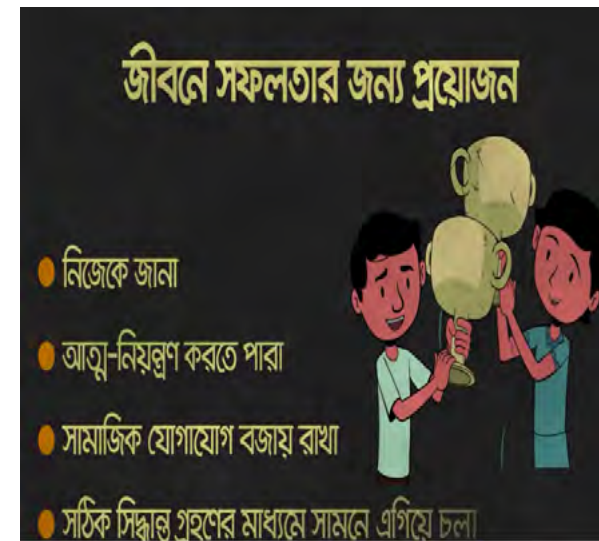
Figure 7. Trauma-informed SEL: teacher training video developed by Room to Read, Bangladesh

were selected through purposive sampling from three districts of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The selected parents and children received resource materials and support from Room to Read.

We obtained interesting insights from this study. Our major learnings were:

1   SEL activities created a space for meaningful interaction between parents and children:

- Does your child get a chance to talk/share her/his thoughts during SEL activities?
- 'My son asks lots of questions during storytime. Earlier he was more like an introvert. But now he likes to share his thoughts and spend time with others.'
A mother from Sri Lanka

2　Children could express their feelings and emotions:

- Does your child get a chance to express her/his feelings (fear, being angry, happy and sad) in *th*ese activities?
- 'My brother was afraid of lions but as he read the story Lion and Fox and drew a picture, he says now if a lion comes in front of me, I am going to fight him.'
  A caretaker from India

3　Parents were better equipped to spend quality time with children:

- Have you observed any change in your engagement/time spent with children after these activities have been introduced?
- 'I saw my son cutting ladies fingers/okra for an activity given in the worksheet. I helped him, thinking he might cut his finger. We both ended up making different colorful figures from the vegetables which was fun altogether.'
  A father from India

4　Reading stories and drawing emerged as two key activities where children could concentrate most:

- What are some activities where she/he concentrates most?
- 'Drawing is her favorite activity; she always wants to draw. I think she feels happy while drawing, that's why she loves it.'
  A mother from Bangladesh

We felt encouraged by the feedback from parents and have continued to integrate SEL activities in the ongoing literacy initiatives. Although the process started during COVID, it has continued post-COVID. Children faced a lot of stress during COVID, especially in the low-income communities where we work. Governments recognize this and the need to integrate SEL in education. There is also a demand from some donors to address social and emotional aspects of learning.

The following illustration demonstrates our journey with SEL so far:

Timeline

2020	2022	Incorporating SEL into literacy program
SEE learning training	Integrating SEL in COVID pivots	

The way forward

As schools reopened and children returned to classrooms, we resumed our literacy activities. To varying degrees, there is an acknowledgement of learning loss that happened during the school closures. In many places, a hybrid modality has continued for some of the activities. For example, given the learning loss, governments are hesitant in pulling out teachers again for training. Hence, hybrid working with teachers has continued in some locations. Similarly, a push by governments during COVID towards digitization of resources such as teacher training videos has also continued.

Going forward, we will continue to integrate SEL in our learning materials, such as library books and pupils' books. We will also continue to orient teachers and parents to support children's SEL. We recently completed the Global Book project on SEL, in which all our Country Offices participated, and we will finalize SEL-themed books during 2023. We have also decided that 2023 will be the Year of the Picture Book and will work to develop picture books across the countries we work in. Picture books support social and emotional learning, as children develop social imagination and awareness when they consider the inner lives and challenges of the characters in the books. They develop better social skills, stronger moral development, enhanced self-regulation, and engage in less misbehavior at home and at school (Walther, 2018).

Lessons learned

Based on our experience of integrating SEL in the literacy program so far, we have learned some lessons:

- We know that children learn by observing and watching adults. This is especially true for social and emotional learning. SEL needs to be demonstrated for children to emulate. To be able to do this, it is important that the adults who support children, such as teachers and parents, are oriented on SEL. Their own social and emotional well-being will go a long way to support that of children.
- There are different ways of implementing a SEL program, including as separate classes. However, for us, since we already had an established program, it worked well to integrate it into existing initiatives. Once we had deepened our own understanding and awareness of SEL competencies and skills, it became easier to identify program components where we could introduce and/or strengthen SEL.
- As with other literacy initiatives, it is crucial to have the buy-in of key stakeholders right from the start. These include government, parents, communities, and donors. Many of the resources developed during COVID were uploaded on government websites and distributed to government schoolteachers so that they could take it forward with parents and children. This was possible due to orientations held for teacher educators and other government officials. The resources were developed with the support of donors who understood the need for SEL. And parents have played a crucial role in supporting children at home and creating space for these activities.

We are all still learning about SEL and ways to integrate it further in the literacy program. We hope to deepen the initiative in face-to-face settings and to continue to document our experiences.

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Section Two

English as an
Additional Language

9

The reciprocity between English language learning and social emotional learning: The case of Vietnam

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the reciprocal relationship between English language learning and social emotional learning (SEL) in the context of Vietnam's education system, especially during the current Education Renovation period when the Ministry of Education and Training has shown continuous efforts in proposing new policies to boost the effectiveness of English language teaching. The discussion suggests that there is a reciprocity between language learning and SEL, and that social emotional factors in the English language national curriculum seem to be the missing element that hinders Vietnamese students from achieving the wider goal of learning English as a second language. The paper reviews the new National Curriculum Framework of 2018 and the existing sets of textbooks, and demonstrates that while the new curriculum has been noticeably enhanced from the previous version, SEL elements were not explicitly recognized in the existing curriculum guidelines. Instead, they were incorporated into the textbooks' selection of topics, learning content, and learning projects only at upper secondary levels. To explain this phenomenon, the paper explores the challenges faced by Vietnam's education sector, which makes the process of SEL implementation demanding and not readily achievable in the short term, and proposes some immediate solutions.

1. Learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in Vietnam's education context

In general, the history of English language education in Vietnam is strongly associated with the country's socio-political and historical periods. During their colonization of the country in the first half of the 20th century, the French abolished the use of Chinese traditional characters in administrative documents and mandated the use of Vietnamese and French as the two official languages of the country. As a consequence, for the whole colonial period, French was taught as an additional language at primary and secondary schools throughout Vietnam (Hoang, 2018). Similarly, in the 1950s, after World War II, Vietnam was divided into two parts – the North and the South – in which the former was allied with the former Soviet Union while the latter was with the U.S.A. As a result, English was learned mostly by Southern people, while people from the North learned Russian for direct communication with the Soviet party (Hoang, 2018).

It was not until the Renovation Year in 1986 – when Vietnam initiated an economic reform with the Open Door policy as a response to the emergence of economic and political globalization – that English officially became the first and only foreign language taught in the national curriculum (Nguyen, 2016). English also became one of the six subjects examined for the National High School Graduation Examination and a compulsory subject for both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in higher education (Canh, 2007). However, it is notable that the teaching and learning methodology during this time was strongly translation-driven and grammar-heavy with the aim of preparing learners with sufficient grammatical and syntactic knowledge to achieve high scores in national exams.

Since the 1990s, with the massive impacts of English as a *lingua franca*, or the world's language, the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam has begun to shift from a grammar and translation focus to a more communicative and creative approach. With this new philosophy, the existing textbooks for English have proved ineffective (Hoang, 2018). In 2002, the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) initiated a new approach for textbooks for all school subjects, which were officially launched in 2006 across the whole general educational system (MOET, 2006). The goals of the new English curriculum and the new textbooks were for students to develop comprehensive English language knowledge and four skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing – and to attain an understanding of world cultures as well as develop an awareness of cross-cultural differences. Vietnamese students should also be able to 'inform the world' about Vietnamese people, history, and culture (MOET, 2006).

2. The effectiveness of teaching and learning ESL in Vietnam's education system

Regardless of its long history of English language learning and teaching, in the series of surveys conducted for the English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) – the world's largest ranking of countries and regions by the English skills of more than 2 million students in 112 countries, based on their performances in various English tests, including IELTS, TOEFL, and TOEIC as well as Cambridge exams (KET, PET, FCE, CPE) – Vietnamese students' English skills improved from 'very low' to 'low' proficiency between 2011 and 2014, maintained a 'moderate' level from 2015 to 2018, before shrinking again to 'low' proficiency in 2019 (EF, 2022). This figure brought Vietnam down to 52nd place out of 100 examined countries in 2019, 65th out of 100 countries in 2020 (see Table 1), and 13th out of 24 Asian countries, in which Singapore ranked first with 'very high proficiency', followed by the Philippines, Malaysia, Hong Kong, India, South Korea, Taiwan, and so on. According to EF, the 'low

Year	Rank	Proficiency level
2022	#60 of 111	moderate
2021	#66 of 112	low
2020	#65 of 100	low
2019	#52 of 100	low
2018	#41 of 88	moderate
2017	#34 of 80	moderate
2016	#31 of 72	moderate
2015	#29 of 70	moderate
2014	#33 of 63	low
2013	#28 of 60	low
2012	#31 of 54	low
2011	#39 of 44	very low

● **Table 1.** Vietnam's rankings in the Global English Proficiency Index by EF

proficiency' indicates the ability to 'navigate an English-speaking country as a tourist, engage in small talk with colleagues, and understand simple emails from colleagues' (EF, 2022). It is obvious that this level of proficiency is far from the goals of MOET in English education, as aforementioned.

Indeed, the fact that Vietnam has not made much progress in the global EPI map and obtained such low ranking compared to neighboring countries proved that English learning and teaching approaches are somewhat ineffective. The most plausible explanation could be that the official curriculum from 2008 still maintained a strong focus on grammatical rules and vocabulary range. The second explanation could be that national teacher training programs had not been successful in transforming teachers' grammar-driven pedagogy into more communication-driven teaching approaches; therefore, teachers, especially the older ones, are likely to be uncomfortable and unconfident in using English beyong the grammar-focused methods. *More importantly, the learning goals set out by the Vietnam curriculum seemed not to have considered*

the wider purpose of learning a second language.

Learning a second language successfully does not mean being able to comprehend and explicitly explain the rules of grammar, or vocabulary meanings, but rather to use language for effective communication between people of different mother tongues, so that they can communicate, connect, share thoughts, and exchange ideas with each other. As Sowton (2021) stated in *Teaching in Challenging Circumstances: a Cambridge Handbook for Language Teachers*, students might have sufficient grammar and a wide range of vocabulary and strong receptive skills of reading and listening to their second language, but the main goal of language learning, whether first, second, or third, should be that the speakers can say and write their intended meanings for communication purposes.

Learning a new language also means learning about new culture, new minds, and new ways of life, ways of thinking, and ways of doing things. Learning a new language, therefore, genuinely helps cultivate the mind by opening one's mind about the wider world, about respecting others' values and cultures, about accepting differences as a part of life. Many researchers have also highlighted that learning a new language successfully allows people to develop a Theory of Mind, which refers to one's capacity to understand and sympathize with other people, including their mental states, beliefs, thoughts, intentions, and emotions (Baimel et al., 2015). A study by Kalland and Linnavalli (2022) on 90 children aged 3–5 years showed that early bilinguals performed much better than monolinguals on empathy tests as well as performing better in perspective-taking skills. These results align with other research on the benefits of bilingualism, including de Rosnay and Hughes (2006) and Milligan et al. (2007).

In short, language should not be acquired and learnt as a single, self-contained subject or a string of rules, but rather in relation to social, psychological, and emotional elements; and this seems to be one of the missing elements in Vietnam's old curriculum framework. The new National Curriculum Framework, introduced in 2018 – which aims to transform a knowledge-based education into an education system that comprehensively develops students' qualities and capabilities, harmonizing the factors of virtue, intelligence, health, and beauty, and making the most of a student's potential – therefore provides an opportunity to fulfil this missing element. This paper will thus review the new curriculum to evaluate what has already been done and what more can be done to increase the effectiveness of English learning and teaching in Vietnam's education context, helping students to achieve the wider purpose of learning a second language.

3. Evidence for the association between language learning and social emotional learning

Before evaluating the new National Curriculum Framework, it is worth investigating the science behind the association between language learning and social emotional factors. In fact, a number of existing studies (Halle et al., 2014; Jurkic et al., 2023; Longoria et al., 2008) on different educational contexts have demonstrated the reciprocal relationship between language learning and social emotional development, confirming that social emotional development plays a significant role in the success of language learning. Theoretically, language learning nurtures emotional development, and, vice versa, high levels of emotional intelligence and competence facilitate the process of language learning; that is, the use of language for effective and appropriate communication in particular social contexts (CASEL, 2022). This section of the paper will provide scientific evidence for this association from different perspectives, providing a theoretical foundation for further curriculum and textbook evaluation.

Definition. According to CASEL (2022), Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and apply effectively the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage their own emotions (self-awareness); set and achieve appropriate goals (self-management); feel and show empathy and prosocial behaviors

with others (social awareness); establish and maintain positive relationships (relationship skills); and make responsible decisions (responsible decision-making). Specifically, in dealing with oneself, SEL helps individuals to recognize, manage, and self-regulate emotions, as well as set and achieve positive goals. In dealing with others, SEL helps individuals develop understanding and empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions in the community. The SEL concept developed under the Harvard EASEL project adds the domains of values, identity, and perspectives to the cognitive, social and emotional components.[1] It is also noted that SEL frameworks vary according to culture and context (NISSEM, 2022).

Developmental perspective. From the developmental point of view, there is a reciprocal relationship between language and SEL, especially among children. Specifically, Hanno and Surrain (2019) argue that language development has proved to be related to children's self-regulation in both direct and indirect ways. In a direct way, being able to name and address emotions helps children learn to express and self-regulate their feelings explicitly and appropriately, rather than acting them out (Hanno & Surrain, 2019; Zeegers et al., 2017). In an indirect way, researchers in the field of brain-based learning showed how social and emotional needs, if not addressed properly, affect students' self-regulation of emotions and behaviors, thus negatively impacting their language learning process (Jensen, 2009). Moreover, the association between language and social emotional development is also found when studying children with special needs. Specifically, a number of studies (Desmarais et al., 2008; Hawa & Spanoudis, 2014) have demonstrated that early language issues, including speech disorder and speech delay, are highly associated with poor social emotional functioning. To conclude, from a developmental viewpoint, the reciprocal correlation between language development and social emotional development is indispensable.

Psycholinguistic perspective. From a psychological perspective, it is shown that experiencing social and emotional issues might significantly hinder the acquisition of the second language (Krashen, 1985). According to Krashen, every language learner has an 'affective filter' in which certain affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem, might filter out the input, making it incomprehensible (Krashen, 1985). In other words, a language learner who is stressed, anxious, tense, or bored might have negative learning experiences and therefore not acquire language to the best of their ability. This further confirms the relationship between language learning and emotional elements.

Sociocultural perspective. From a sociocultural viewpoint, it is believed that knowledge and understanding is constructed through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, learners develop their knowledge and skills in a second language via social and emotional processes including interaction with others, output production, metacognitive reflection, and engagement in meaning negotiation. This viewpoint highlights the importance of providing students with sufficient social communication and opportunities to gain input and produce output, which can be strongly reinforced via components of social emotional learning (e.g., relationship skills). In short, the relationship between language and social emotional factors are, again, proven from a socio-cultural perspective.

It is, thus, claimed that the relationship between language development and social emotional development is reciprocal, in which social emotional factors play significant roles in the success of language learning (from developmental, psychological and sociocultural perspectives) and, vice versa, language acquisition contributes to social emotional development (from the developmental perspective). From a more general perspective, a number of studies have demonstrated that since SEL boosts students' wellness by shaping their social emotional competences and allowing them to better manage their personal and collective behaviors, it helps prepare students for school readiness and potentially better academic achievement in the later stages

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1   http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu

(Crisafulli, 2020). Many scholars, therefore, have identified SEL as 'the critical piece' for developing students as future responsible citizens and scholars (Bridgeland, Bruce & Hariharan, 2013, p. 13).

It can be concluded that SEL is vital for the success of language learning. The question now is whether SEL elements are integrated into the new National Curriculum Framework. Has MOET planned to provide teachers with sufficient training on social emotional competences and how to teach them effectively? And, what can be done to increase awareness of social emotional learning among relevant stakeholders? The final part of this paper will analyze the new National Curriculum Framework of 2018 with a focus on SEL integration, review the challenges in implementing SEL in English language learning in the context of Vietnam's education system, and, lastly, provide recommendations from our insiders' perspective.

4. The practice of SEL in education and language learning: The case of Vietnam's National Curriculum Framework of 2018, current textbooks, and SEL integration

Compared to the previous framework designed in 2006, which still focused on grammatical and lexical development, the new English language curriculum framework, developed in 2018, aims to balance the development of three aspects: (1) the variety of learning topics, (2) students' communication competence, and (3) language knowledge (including phonics, vocabulary, and grammar), with a strong focus on communication skills (MOET, 2018). Specifically, at primary level, English language learning should allow students to develop basic communication competence via the teaching of four skills, with more attention to be paid to listening and speaking. At lower secondary levels, students should be given opportunities to develop their communication competence and thinking ability to enhance their knowledge about the societal norms and cultures of different countries, as well as to deepen their understanding of their own culture (MOET, 2018). At upper secondary levels, the teaching

should allow students to continue honing their communication skills and knowledge about the world, as well as equipping them with life-learning skills for their future employability (MOET, 2018).

From a curriculum design, or macro, perspective, it is clear that the course objectives and learning outcomes of both the old and new curriculum frameworks (2006 and 2018) still maintain a strong focus on the theoretical knowledge that students acquire, with the latter framework having added the development of soft skills (e.g., communication skills and thinking ability). SEL components, including self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making according to the CASEL framework, have hardly been mentioned or considered clearly as an aspect for development in the English national curriculum. This is also true for the components found in other SEL frameworks developed by Harvard University, such as the 21st Century Learning framework, Character Lab framework, and ACT Holistic framework.

From a textbook, or micro, perspective, the current three sets of textbooks used across Vietnam for English language teaching are the results of collaboration between national and international publishers (e.g., Oxford University Press and Cengage Learning) to customize international English-learning textbooks for Vietnamese students according to MOET's guidance. It is observed that the textbooks have similar structures across levels, aiming to meet the fundamental requirements of the national curriculum framework, with (1) various topics about different parts of the world and different aspects of culture (e.g., Natural Wonders of Vietnam, Our Tet Holiday, Learning World in grade 6 textbooks), (2) focus on communication competence with listening and conversational exercises (e.g., Listen and finish the sentences, Listen and fill in the blanks, Pair up with your peer and practice), and (3) language use, including vocabulary, grammar, and phonics (e.g., Complete the text, Choose the right answer (for multiple choice questions), and Practice these sounds with your partner).
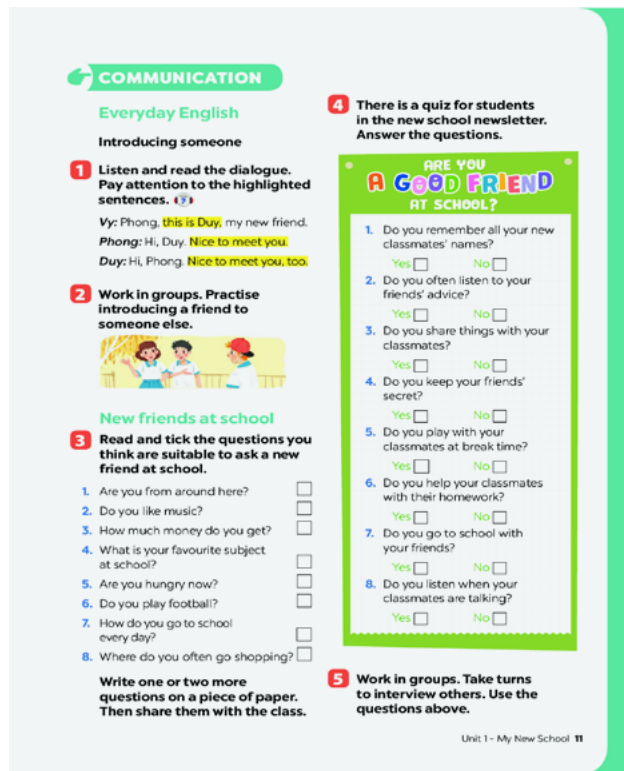
● **Figure 1.** Sample speaking exercises in Grade 6 textbook *Knowledge to Life Connection* (*Kết Nối Tri Thức với Cuộc Sống*)

It is noticeable that at primary and lower secondary levels, there are very limited SEL-based activities. One of the tasks that might activate students' development of SEL is speaking, in which students are asked to interview each other to learn more about their peers. For instance, in Figure 1, students ask each other questions about their relationships with classmates, which helps strengthen students' understanding of each other, thus enhancing their relationship skills.

At upper secondary levels, the topics are significantly related to SEL factors, particularly *relationship skills* (e.g., The Generation Gap, Relationships, in the grade 11 textbook), and *social awareness* (e.g., Caring for those in need, Cultural Identity, in the grade 11 and grade 12 textbooks). Figure 2 further demonstrates that a number of learning outcomes are associated with CASEL's SEL components: for instance, the project 'Discuss reasons for taking a gap year and reasons for starting university immediately' in the grade 11 textbook allows learners to develop their *self-management skill* and *responsible decision making*. The learning content also allows room for SEL development, specifically *self-awareness*, in which students are given opportunities to learn about different ways of staying healthy, and are asked to discuss their personal habits to keep their physical health in good condition (Figure 3). To conclude, textbook analysis suggests that while SEL elements are not very noticeable in the lower secondary textbooks, they are integrated closely into the topics of learning, learning outcomes, and learning content of upper secondary textbooks (especially grades 10, 11, and 12).

It is, however, noted that SEL knowledge and skills cannot only be taught in a limited way via the learning content and design of the exercises, but also need to inform teachers' pedagogical approaches when designing classroom activities. However, from a pedagogical point of view, SEL is not a recognized component of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities for English teachers in Vietnam. There is no official guidance on how to develop English teachers' social emotional competence at a national or regional scale. This contrasts with the U.S., for example, where many schools have begun to use the CASEL framework to establish K–12 learning standards and course objectives, articulating clearly that students should obtain social emotional competence (SEC) for 'academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling careers' (CASEL, 2018; Billy & Garriguez, 2021). Illinois became the first state in the U.S. to develop specific SEL standards for K–12 students, in which students in second language classes are required to identify and label emotions accurately, recognize how emotions are connected to their behaviors and how emotions

	Topic	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Grammar	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Communication and Culture	Project	
Unit 6		Global Warming	Words and phrases related to global warming	Intonation in yes-no questions & echo questions	Perfect gerunds and perfect participles	Reading for general ideas and specific information about the causes and effects of global warming	Expressing opinions, agreement or disagreement about solutions to global warming	Listening for specific information about the causes and effects of global warming	Writing an essay about the causes and effects of global warming, and possible solutions	Preparing a talk on global warming for Green Teens Club Young voices for the Planet	Making an action plan of an environmental activity to reduce the carbon footprint of your school and community
Unit 7	Further Education	Words and phrases related to further education	Intonation in wh-questions	The present perfect and the present perfect continuous	Reading for general ideas and specific information about higher education opportunities	Expressing preferences for different further education pathways	Listening for specific information about studying abroad	Writing an email asking for information about higher education opportunities	Discussing higher education in Vietnam Further education in Singapore	Discussing reasons for taking a gap year and reasons for starting university immediately, and presenting them in class	
Unit 8	Our World Heritage Sites	Words and phrases related to World Heritage Sites	Intonation in choice questions	Participles and 'to –' infinitive clauses	Reading for general ideas and specific information in an article about Ha Long Bay and its attractions	Making suggestions about places to visit in the Complex of Hue moments	Listening for specific information in a radio program about Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park	Writing an essay about the reasons why Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex was recognised as a World Heritage Site	Discussing where to go on a field trip Taj Mahal, a World Heritage Site in India	Selecting a heritage site in Viet Nam and making a proposal for its preservation and protection	
Review 3											
Unit 9	Cities of the Future	Words and phrases related to cities of the future	Intonation in question tags	Question tags Conditional sentences type 0	Reading for general ideas and specific information about the city of the future	Explaining facts and giving predictions	Listening for specific information about future cities	Writing an email to a friend about city life in the future	Discussing ideal cities of the future A smart city in South Korea	Designing a poster of an ideal city	
Unit 10	Healthy Lifestyle and Longevity	Words and phrases related to cities of Healthy Lifestyle and Longevity	Intonation in statements and questions expressing invitation, suggestion, polite request, uncertainty, and surprise	Reported speech with conditionals Reported speech with 'to –' infinitives and gerunds	Reading for specific information about factors responsible for the increase in life expectancy	Giving advice on body care	Listening for specific information about physical activity precautions	Writing a story about how young people have changed their lifestyle to overcome a problem	Understanding the benefits of meditation and discussing ways to relieve stress A longevity hot spot in Japan	Giving a presentation on a longevity hot spot Conducting a survey on factors that help people to live longer	

● **Table 2.** Learning objectives for Grade 11, Part 2 textbook,
The Horizon of Creativity (*Chân trời Sáng tạo*)

● **Figure 2.** Sample exercise for Grade 11, Part 1 textbook, *The Horizon of Creativity* (*Chân trời Sáng tạo*)

and expressions in other cultures are understood and interpreted in completely different ways (Hoffman, 2009). The Illinois government and CASEL also published a guideline for teachers to integrate SEL elements into their daily educational activities. To conclude, despite its importance in facilitating the success of language learning, social emotional learning has not been explicitly integrated into Vietnam's English language curriculum or teacher training programs. On a brighter note, several SEL elements have been incorporated into the design of the topics

and exercises in the textbooks at upper secondary levels, albeit to a limited extent.

5. Challenges for implementing SEL in English Language learning in Vietnam

The lack of social emotional education in Vietnam's national education system suggests that immediate steps should be taken to help students improve their social emotional competence in second language learning. However, it is first worth considering the current main challenges that make integrating SEL a challenge in the context of Vietnam's new curriculum, including teachers' low level of qualifications, their lack of SEL-based pedagogical training, and the national testing system which is still focused on examinations.

Teachers' competences. The low level of English competences and old-fashioned pedagogical skills found among English teachers in Vietnam are certainly the first and foremost issues for SEL implementation. According to a report from the National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) in 2019, 30% of public secondary school teachers did not meet English proficiency requirements, especially at Levels 4 and 5 of the 6-level Foreign Language Competency Framework (FLCF) in Vietnam (Truong, 2017). Moreover, it is worth noting that the whole country is in the process of educational renovation under Decision No. 29-NQ/TW of the government on the development of fundamental and comprehensive education and training system, to meet the core requirements of the industrialization and modernization era (Dang, 2018). Therefore, the general education system is going through a number of changes and reforms in which the introduction of the new National Curriculum Framework is just one aspect. MOET has imposed other policies to set higher standards for primary and secondary teachers regarding their prerequisites to become school teachers. However, the reality has shown that the higher requirements for teachers' competences and skills, instead of encouraging teachers to strive for improvement, have put more pressure on them and as a result,

more than 10,000 decided to resign from their jobs in 2022 alone, among whom were English teachers at both primary and secondary levels (Nguyen, 2022). Adding to the pressure on teachers' competences, the Department of Education and Training in Ho Chi Minh City further claimed that the salary of primary school English teachers is too low (new teachers earn about 3 million VND/month, equivalent to USD$126), while the number of hours of duty teaching is too high (23 hours a week) (Nguyen, 2022). The result is that English teachers with proficient English and pedagogical skills are inclined to work for international and private schools rather than public schools. In general, it is clear that the drastic changes in the job requirements, which are not seen to be proportional to the remuneration, have demotivated the development of the teaching force, challenging the introduction of new concepts, teaching approaches, or training activities, thereby challenging SEL implementation.

Lack of SEL-based pedagogical training. Even though the government has issued policies to enhance the quality of English teaching at all levels, with priority given to the English teaching profession in accordance with the introduction of the new National Curriculum Framework (in 2018) and the implementation of Vietnam's National Foreign Language (in 2020), the training content has not explicitly considered SEL as a recognized component. Specifically, MOET issued Circular 11/2021/BGDDT on the implementation of regular teacher training programs for BA degree holders who wish to become primary school teachers (MOET, 2021) and organized a number of workshops with the participation of both foreign and domestic experts in the field of English education to provide quality training on understanding the Foreign Language Competency Framework (FLCF) and how to enhance one's competences (MOET, 2021). The trainings have been conducted in collaboration with a wide range of universities across Vietnam, aiming for English teachers to reach at least one level higher than their current level of proficiency in the FLCF (MOET, 2020). After these training programs, the teachers have also been

expected to enhance their specialized knowledge and pedagogical skills to increase their level of professionalism, responsiveness to the new context of teaching, and, thus, their general quality of teaching. Currently, MOET continues to review and research solutions to improve the quality of teachers. However, it is clear that while teacher training has been the priority in the recent years, there is a lack of formal and informal SEL-based training. In fact, an empirical study conducted by Son et al. (2022) on 1100 3rd-year and 4th-year students from Ha Noi Pedagogical University majoring in Primary English Education showed that students have limited understanding of SEL. Specifically, they had difficulty in recognizing and distinguishing SEL elements according to the CASEL framework, and were unaware of how to apply the concept of SEL into teaching. It is, nonetheless, noted that social emotional competences have rather been recognized and introduced widely to teachers teaching the Vietnamese language. Specifically, MOET has promoted the use of SEL by issuing official guidelines to innovate current teaching methods and classroom activity organization for teaching Vietnamese literature, as well as organizing seminars and nationwide teacher training programs to enhance teachers' knowledge of how to develop students' SEL competencies and personal qualities. The most recent training initiatives included the national conference on Innovation in Vietnamese Language and Literature Teaching and Assessment (MOET, 2022), and the Enhancing Teacher Education Program (ETEP) in which teachers were provided with nine-module training sessions. This suggests that more attention and efforts to provide SEL-based training to English teachers should be paid in order to optimize students' potential in both language and personal development.

National assessment system. Last but not least, Vietnam's exam-driven culture is another challenge that makes SEL demanding to implement. For many years, Vietnamese students' capacities have been measured via their performance in examinations and other formal assessment. Even though English language is one of the few subjects that allow flexible assessment

equivalency (e.g., the IELTS exams can be used in place of the English examination in the University Entrance Exam), the exam-driven culture is still embedded into teaching and learning habits. Formal education is still 'knowledge-heavy' with a strong focus on grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure rather than on students' practical skills, interests, and state of mind. English teachers, therefore, are still inclined towards test-oriented teaching approaches, in which teachers play a significant role in providing students with 'knowledge' for exam preparation. It is, thus, expected that SEL implementation, which puts a focus on the social and emotional aspects of language learning, will take time to be acquired and implemented by educational institutions nationwide. It is also time-consuming to raise awareness among other relevant stakeholders, including students themselves and parents, who might not have a full understanding regarding the importance of SEL in achieving the wider goal of language learning. Indeed, in order to successfully implement SEL elements into English language teaching in the context of Vietnam's education system, immediate actions need to be taken to transform the exam-driven culture into a new focus on students' capabilities and qualities as stated in the new National Curriculum Framework.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, it is undeniable that there is a reciprocity between language learning and social emotional learning, in which language learning nurtures one's emotional development and in return, a high level of social emotional competence facilitates the process of language acquisition for the purpose of effective and appropriate communication in specific social contexts. In the context of Vietnam's education system, the paper has demonstrated that the lack of social emotional dimensions in the English language national curriculum seems to be a missing element hindering Vietnamese students from achieving the wider goal of learning English as the second language; that is, to learn more about the

world's culture and actively promote one's own culture, to exchange ideas with and learn from others, to facilitate personal growth and develop confidence, to open one's mind, and to increase empathy between people of different mother tongues. This might, to a certain extent, also explain the ineffectiveness of English language learning and teaching, which has put Vietnam in consistently low positions in the EF's global map. With the introduction of the new National Curriculum Framework in 2018, which puts a strong emphasis on the development of students' capabilities and qualities, it is expected that SEL elements might be found in certain components of the new curriculum and textbooks. However, the results of our analysis have highlighted that while the new curriculum has been noticeably improved from the previous version, SEL elements are not explicitly stated in the existing curriculum guidelines; they are rather found to be incorporated into textbook topics, learning content, and projects at upper secondary levels, although to a limited degree. To explain this phenomenon, the paper has explored the challenges that Vietnam's education system confronts, which makes the process of SEL implementation more demanding and less achievable in the short term. Firstly, English teachers are found not to be sufficiently competent or skilful, especially in the context of drastic changes in the teaching job requirements which are not proportional to the remuneration scheme, thus limiting the development of the teaching force. Secondly, even though the government has put effort into increasing the quality of teacher training, SEL is not recognized as official training content for English teachers, while the opposite can be found regarding the training of Vietnamese language teachers. Lastly, the exam-driven culture of Vietnam's education system is solidly embedded in teachers' teaching practices, and, thus, little attention has been paid to the social and emotional facets of the language learning process.

For these reasons, it is suggested that MOET should take immediate steps to ensure that Vietnamese students have opportunities to obtain more comprehensive and practical

exposure to the English language, thus equipping them with the necessary competences, capabilities, and qualities during their life-long learning journey. Specifically, the following areas should be given priority: (1) strengthen teacher training activities at national, regional, and local levels, including intensive competence-based training, technology training, social emotional competence training, and SEL-based pedagogical training; (2) enhance the quality of teacher training activities to adapt to the needs of various groups of teachers; (3) propose an incentive scheme for highly proficient English teachers to show the government's strong efforts in improving teachers' quality of life, thus encouraging them to stay dedicated to improving English education in Vietnam; and lastly (4), raise public awareness regarding the wider goal of learning a second language, that is, to use the language for effective communication and for exploring the world, rather than merely for examination performances.

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The social and emotional aspects of learning to speak English as an L2 in the Egyptian primary classroom

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Abstract

Drawing on the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT), this study investigates the social and emotional aspects of children's experiences of anxiety and agency/autonomy during speaking pairwork activities in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) primary classroom. Nine English language teachers were introduced to the framework of SDT and trained in using it to plan and implement speaking pairwork activities in their classrooms. Using pairwork and focusing on speaking were quite innovative practices in these classrooms where more traditional teacher-centered and grammar–translation approaches to teaching and learning prevailed, which meant that there was limited focus on collaborative learning and development of spoken language skills. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools with a sample of primary-school children (n=281), this study investigated the interplay between anxiety and autonomy during pairwork speaking activities. Findings indicated that there was a negative correlation between anxiety experienced and a sense of agency/autonomy: children who were most anxious felt reduced agency/autonomy, which made learning to speak English more difficult. However, children felt least anxious and most autonomous when doing pairwork. The study identified factors that could maximize support for children's sense of agency/autonomy and alleviate their feelings of anxiety in the English-speaking classroom. The study concluded by providing some recommendations for teachers and curriculum development.

Introduction

This article draws on the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT) to investigate primary-school children's social and emotional experiences of anxiety and a sense of agency during lessons for speaking English as a second language (L2). SDT suggests that people can only thrive and learn creatively – as is necessary when learning to communicate with others in an L2 – when they feel sufficiently competent, agentic, and socially related to others. In this article, we describe an intervention in which we introduced simultaneous pairwork into the classes of 281 children in three government primary schools in Alexandria, Egypt. The basis of our intervention was to support communication in L2 learning by attending to its social-emotional dimensions as well as its technical aspects; in particular, children's sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2019) as they learned to speak English as a foreign language (EFL).

Teachers in nine classrooms were introduced to SDT and supported to use simultaneous pairwork for English-speaking lessons (i.e., *all* children speaking in pairs at the same time) with attention to their students' feelings of competence, autonomy, and social relatedness in the classroom. Teachers were provided with techniques they could use to implement pairwork in a way that supported children's sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness. They also practised using these pairwork techniques

through intensive microteaching sessions during which they received feedback from their colleagues and the researchers and also reflected on their practices and understanding of SDT. Later, in schools, one of the researchers attended classes with these teachers and observed how they implemented pairwork activities. These observation sessions were followed by feedback and reflection sessions with the teachers.

The aim was to implement SDT, potentially leading to improved English language speaking skills. We also had the long-term social justice goal of improving the children's wellbeing in the broader sense foregrounded by SDG Target 4.7, which might be achieved both by supporting communication through English and through the pedagogy of pairwork specifically:

> Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for … human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence.

As in many low- to middle-income countries, EFL classrooms in Egypt tend to be over-crowded and under-resourced. Teacher-centered classes, grammar–translation methods, and teaching to the test are common practices in these classes with very little, if any, attention to individual differences or socio-emotional aspects of learning, which ultimately leads these classes to lack features considered necessary for effective language learning (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009; Watanabe & Swain, 2008). Repeated reports in Egypt have pointed to primary-aged learners' failure to develop the necessary interactional foreign language skills they need to function on both the global and national levels (see Hanushek, 2008; ECD/World Bank Review Team, 2014). Less attention, however, has been given to the social and emotional aspects of classroom learning and their influence on L2 attainment and the attainment of greater levels of global peace.

As language researchers and educators, we all work hard to find ways to support pupils' learning and development. Often, we investigate the impact of using different teaching methods, curricula, or technologies and we may overlook the learners themselves, how they are feeling during lessons, and what they can therefore teach us about how to enhance their language learning experiences. In our research, we asked the children *themselves* to tell us what helped them; we guided them to fill in surveys, talk, and draw pictures to convey their responses.

Teaching and developing speaking skills in English

Developing spoken interactional language skills is a particularly steep challenge despite being important for global equality and social justice. More than with other language skills, there are specific socio-cultural and affective factors beyond linguistic and cognitive ones that impact learners' ability to speak and interact in English in the classroom (Shvidko et al., 2015). Our current research investigates the varying factors in relation to foreign language speaking anxiety and learner autonomy that facilitate or hinder pupils who are learning to speak English inside the classroom. Our findings provide responses from pupils themselves about variables that support or hinder the development of their spoken language skills. It therefore emphasizes the views of the pupils, on how to support and encourage their speaking of English, as its main evidence-source.

In terms of children's need for autonomy during L2 acquisition in the language classroom, young learners would develop their own, internal hypotheses about language systems, in order to take the initiative within language usage. However, it is only through meaningful interaction that learners use the language to communicate messages, negotiate meaning, and receive feedback on their use of the language in real-life contexts in which they can test and verify the hypotheses they have developed about its systems. The research therefore suggests that learners must engage in meaningful interactional activities with their peers as they learn to speak. However, young learners

often find it threatening to speak in front of their classmates and teachers feel reluctant to promote spoken work in their classes when they themselves have low proficiency levels or lack confidence in relation to listening and speaking. While teachers' language proficiency level is important, other linguistic and non-linguistic factors could impede pupils' speaking of English even more: for example, when the classroom culture is not compassionate, collaborative, and equitable. In particular, classroom environments that do not value pupils' participation and collaborative work may not provide conditions for developing spoken interactional skills. The use of pairwork, then, can contribute to language development and interactional spoken competencies because it allows young learners space to practice and experiment with language in a relatively low-anxiety setting. Pairwork provides peer scaffolding and support especially for struggling learners and those who may lack the necessary language competencies or self-confidence to speak English in front of the whole class (Hargreaves et al., 2020).

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation by teachers and/or peers, and test anxiety act together to create foreign language classroom anxiety. When students dread interacting with others in the foreign language, believe that their teachers and/or peers see them as less competent, and fear making mistakes, they tend to avoid or withdraw from participating in classroom activities and therefore have fewer opportunities for learning. Several studies have concluded that language anxiety and language learning are negatively correlated (Zhao, Guo & Dynia, 2013).

Language learner competence, autonomy, and relatedness (CAR)

Ryan and Deci (2019) highlighted evidence for the critical role of supports for Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness (CAR) in human development and creative learning, including the processes necessary for initiating speaking in a foreign language. Self Determination Theory (SDT) has been extensively researched in education and proposes 'the importance of autonomous motivation for students' quality of learning and engagement' (Ryan & Deci, 2019, p. 138): that is, for learners to willingly engage in proactively initiating talk in L2. In our research, we explored the relationship between children's perceived autonomy (reflecting their agency) and their experiences of learning to *speak* English through pairwork, in contrast to learning English through their regular recitation practices. By autonomy, Ryan and Deci (2019) mean 'a wholehearted willingness to act' (ibid, 132) and 'willingness, empowerment and volition' (ibid, 123). Agency, as reflected in autonomy (and used interchangeably with autonomy for the remainder of this paper), was described by Helwig (2006) as an essential aspect of the human propensity for curiosity and creativity. Helwig also posited that constraints to agency can lead to a dampening of the child's curiosity, creativity, overall well-being, and sense of community. We suggest that these negative effects may be particularly acute in relation to learning to *speak* a foreign language since this demands curiosity, creativity, overall well-being, and a sense of community in a way that other areas of the curriculum may not.

According to SDT, one's perceived autonomy is inextricably connected to both competence (i.e., in our case, a sense that one is good at speaking English) and a feeling of belonging to a community (in this case, to one's pair or class). Competence and autonomy are connected in that one's competence becomes more evident to oneself – and may be actually enhanced – when autonomy operates. Ryan and Deci explained that the highest-quality dyadic relationships, for example pairwork, entail mutuality of autonomy (2019, 114). In other words, a pair of novice English speakers in a pairwork dyad needs to sense their mutual autonomy in order to experience competence and relatedness. Many studies associated with SDT have provided evidence that agency is needed for some aspects of productive learning in many different cultures (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2012;

Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). We were interested to see whether or how this would be manifested within the Egyptian EFL classroom and what role the emotional and social traits associated with a sense of autonomy played in encouraging learning to speak English.

We also highlight in this paper the importance of children's relatedness during language learning in which free and equal relationships between people are needed for success. Ryan and Deci (2019) emphasized how volitional, supportive relationships are essential for high-quality performance; they also stress that this relatedness must be accompanied by a sense of autonomy. Their emphasis links closely to SDG Target 4.7 which promotes 'education for ... human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence'.

Children's perceptions of their own autonomy and competence are inter-connected with this target of promoting 'a culture of peace and non-violence' which can be fostered by a culture of equality among generations, respect for social groups, and genders, which lies at the heart of the human-rights approach to peace. Pairwork, collaboratively and proactively led by children with the caring support of the teacher, can be one means by which such ideas and practices are nurtured.

We note that the situation in the classrooms described in this article may differ from those in other countries where corporal punishment and bullying are not tolerated. In Egypt, corporal punishment was outlawed but has not been fully eliminated. This appeared to make relatedness between pupils and teachers, and among pupils themselves, more problematic.

Research design

Our research aimed to investigate the social and emotional factors that encouraged and discouraged young learners' learning of spoken English inside the classroom. The study used a research intervention of pairwork use and was carried out in three government primary schools in Alexandria, Egypt, that serve disadvantaged children. The research aimed to investigate the following main question:

In relation to anxiety and autonomy, how do primary pupils experience learning to speak English during classroom pairwork activities?

Research intervention

In September 2019, local authorities in Alexandria selected three government schools to take part in this research project. The schools were in three different locations across Alexandria and were all considered under-resourced schools. Nine classes, with a total of 281 children, from these three schools participated in the study. All consents were obtained from relevant stakeholders following the British Sociological Association guidelines (2017).

At the beginning of October 2019, the project commenced with a two-day training conference which was attended by seven grade 4 English teachers (pupils aged 9), one grade 5 teacher (pupils aged 10), and one grade 3 teacher (pupils aged 8).

The training conference aimed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they needed to integrate speaking activities into their daily teaching in a way that maximized speaking time for all children and allowed for both peer support and the teacher's support. The teacher participants at the conference were introduced to the key principles of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2019), followed by hands-on teaching and learning strategies that supported learners' sense of competence, agency, and relatedness (CAR) in the English classroom. Teachers were, particularly, guided on how they could use CAR principles to plan and implement pairwork speaking activities using the coursebooks they already had at school (which actually modelled pairwork, although no teachers followed the coursebook's direction in this). The final part of the training included micro-teaching in which each teacher led a lesson based on the textbook, including pairwork, under observation by the rest of the teachers and the two researchers. Through these means,

● Class doing pairwork with teacher monitoring from a distance

the researchers were reassured that the teachers had grasped the concepts of the importance of competence, agency, and relatedness in the teaching of speaking.

The nine teachers then applied pairwork in their classrooms, drawing on the textbook vocabulary and dialogues that all teachers had access to. The authors observed their teaching and provided feedback focused on individual teachers' needs and aimed at supporting teachers to evaluate how they were using pairwork and the extent to which pairwork supported pupils' sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and encouraged them to speak in English. Feedback also aimed to encourage teachers to be creative in using these pairwork activities. While the teachers based pairwork on written dialogues in the textbooks, they also built in opportunities for the children to extend and/or adapt the dialogues. They instructed the whole class to divide into pairs, each of which would practice the dialogue at the same time as all the

others, making excellent use of the available time. Each teacher was observed at least twice during the first academic semester (October–December). The classroom observations were planned within the structure of a pre- and post-observation meeting. During the pre-observation meeting, the researchers met with each teacher in private and discussed the textbook lesson plans and how CAR underpinned their activities, and shared suggestions for implementation. The post-observation meeting engaged teachers in reflecting individually – with the authors – on the teaching and learning experiences in their classes. During the post-observation meeting, teachers were encouraged to experiment with different approaches of how pairwork could better support pupils' spoken English skills.

Research methods

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this current article through questionnaires [n=243 children] and drawings [n= 107]. During February 2020, 243 pupils responded to three different 4-point-scale closed questionnaires that aimed to assess pupils' classroom experience of a) speaking anxiety, b) autonomy support, and c) autonomy satisfaction. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used to measure anxiety and the Perception of Autonomy Support (PAS) and Autonomy Need Satisfaction (ANS) surveys were used to capture autonomy. We did not try to measure relatedness but drawings were employed to capture the child's overall social and emotional experiences when doing pairwork. Pupils were asked to sketch a picture of a situation that made them feel anxious during classroom pairwork activities. However, some pupils refrained from drawing and preferred only to respond to the written aspects of the questionnaire. Others also chose to draw situations that made them feel relaxed and supported during pairwork activities. The number of drawings available for analysis was 107.

Findings from the questionnaire data

The foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS)

The language anxiety scale (Nilsson, 2019) asked respondents to identify the level of anxiety they felt during classroom speaking activities that included working in pairs, making mistakes, not understanding the teacher, speaking without preparation, and dealing with peer pressure. As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of the respondents reported experiencing moderate levels of anxiety during the learning of speaking English. The mean score for girls was slightly but significantly higher than for boys, suggesting that boys were less anxious than girls about speaking English. Girls' and boys' scores are illustrated in the box plots in Figure 2.

Differences in classroom anxiety between girls and boys

Given the focus of the present study on pairwork and specific classroom practices, it was of interest how boys and girls differed in their individual responses within the questionnaire. Statistically significant differences were found for two items: *I am afraid of making mistakes when I speak in English* (t=2.27, df=230.4, p=.02) and *I'm afraid the others will laugh or tease me when I speak English* (t=3.20, df=236.5, p<.01).

In both cases, girls experienced anxiety more frequently than did boys. This finding suggested that the teachers' attitude towards making mistakes and/or how they approached error correction in class acted as a possible trigger of anxiety, especially among girls. It could be that, directly or indirectly, teachers valued accuracy over fluency and encouraged correct answers rather than experimentation with the language and its use to communicate and negotiate meaning, and that girls picked up on this message especially.

This finding also suggested that girls in particular felt more vulnerable to peer pressure as indicated by their fear of peer ridicule when speaking English in class. It is also interesting to note that the item 'It feels ok to speak English in pairs' has the least anxious
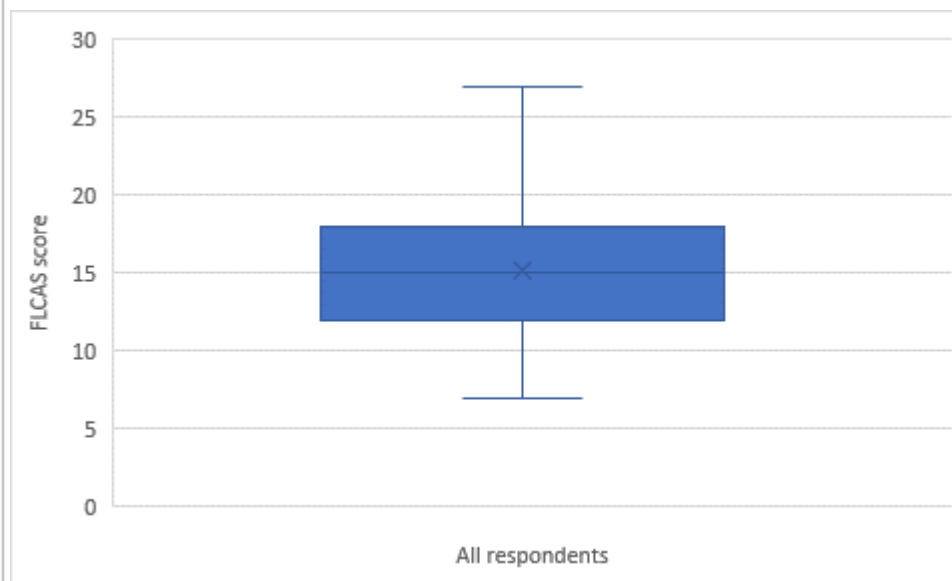
● **Figure 1**. FLCAS scores, all respondents.
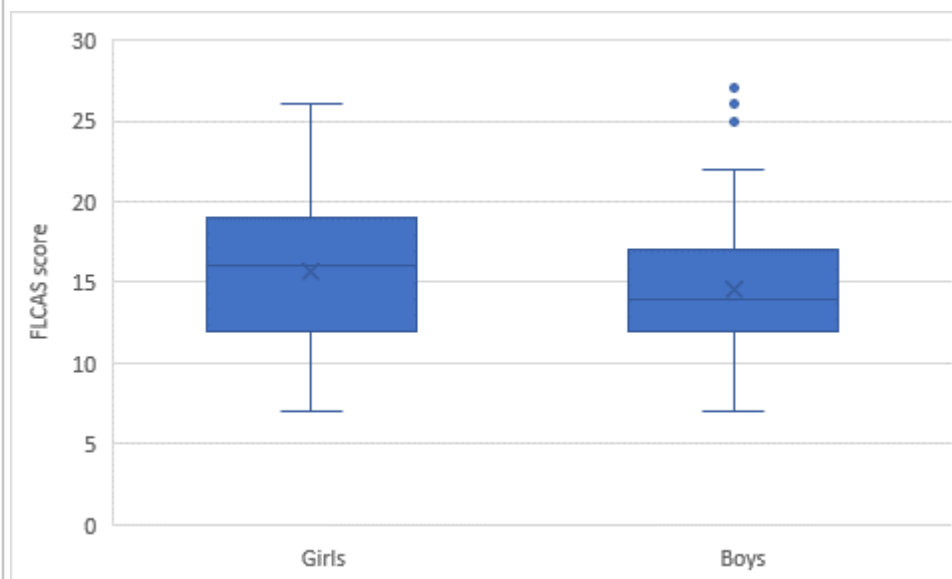
● **Figure 2.** FLCAS scores by gender.

● Providing support to each other

responses from girls and boys. This strongly suggested that pairwork could support learning to speak English with minimal anxiety and provide young learners with an enjoyable and beneficial learning experience. Looking at this item about pairwork and the item about fear of peer ridicule also suggests that peer support is an essential condition for making pairwork successful.

Perception of autonomy support (PAS)

Descriptive statistics for the PAS suggested that children's responses were slightly skewed towards agreeing that their autonomy was supported (see Figure 3). These results suggested that girls perceived a lower level of support for their autonomy in the classroom than did boys. This may imply that teachers needed to provide more choices and encourage more questions when working with girls, or that they tolerated more autonomous
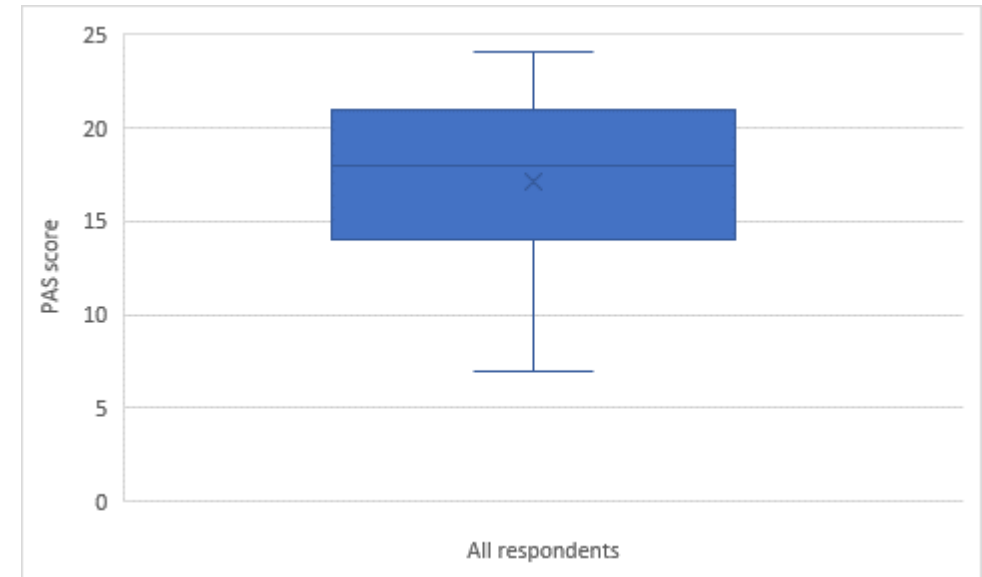
● **Figure 3.** PAS scores, all respondents
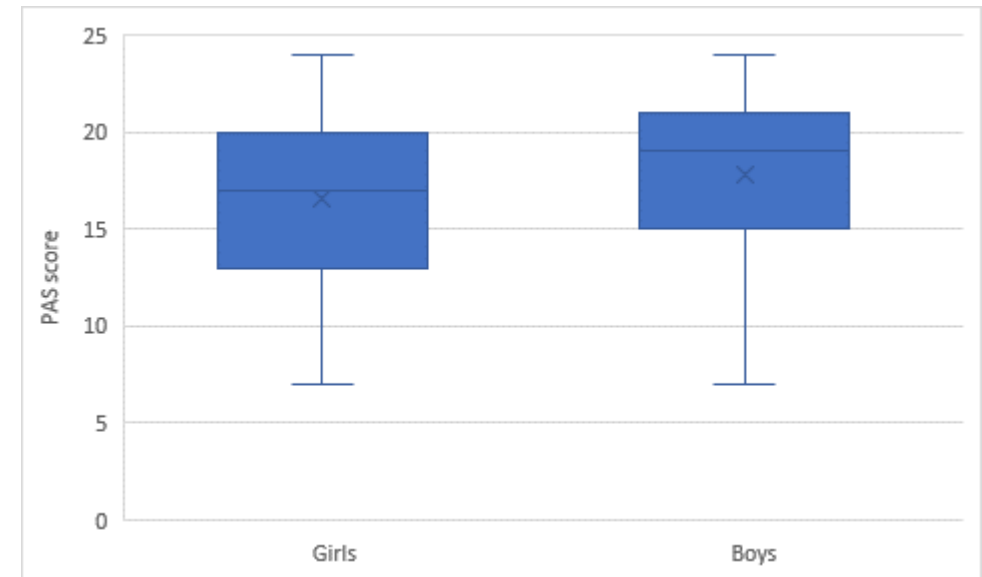
● **Figure 4.** PAS scores, by gender
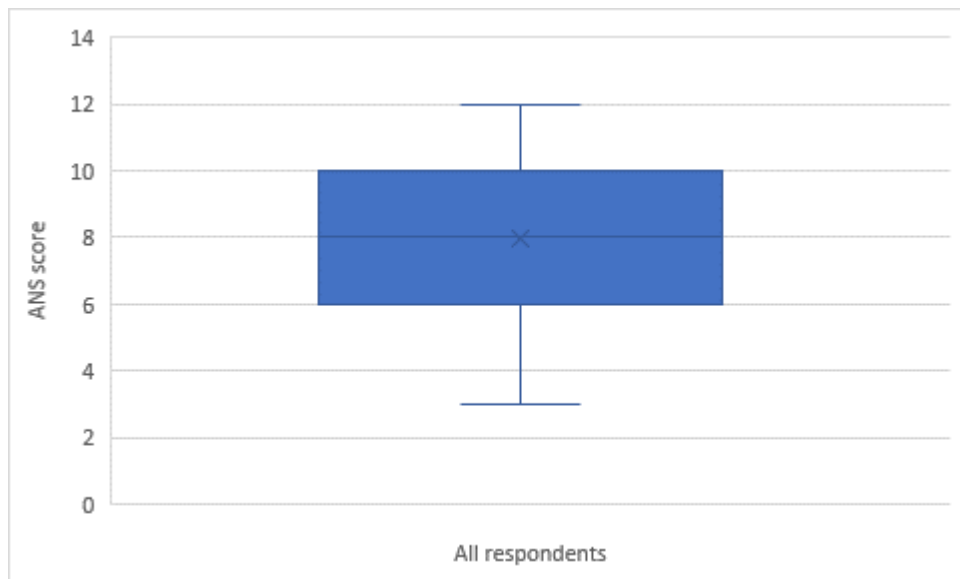
● **Figure 5.** ANS scores, all respondents

behaviour in boys because they were boys. However, it should be noted that reliability for this test was low and our classroom observations did not support the conclusion that autonomy was supported in most classrooms. Girls' and boys' scores are illustrated in the box plots in Figure 4.

Differences in perceptions of autonomy support between girls and boys

As above, the differences between boys' and girls' responses to individual questions were also explored. Statistically significant differences were found for two items: *My English teacher provides choices and options* (t=-3.67, df=228.2, p<.001) and *My English teacher understands what I need* (t=-2.38, df=240.8, p.02). In both cases boys perceived greater autonomy support than did girls.

Autonomy need satisfaction (ANS)

Descriptive statistics for ANS indicated that children's responses were slightly skewed towards agreeing that their autonomy needs

were being met. Mean scores were also calculated separately for girls and for boys but these suggested that, despite the differences in their perceptions of autonomy support, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in their experiences of autonomy-need-satisfaction in the classroom. This might suggest that girls were less willing to express their needs. During classroom observations, we noticed that the girls were more reserved about openly expressing feelings and thoughts.

Summary correlational analyses

The relationships between the three scale variables were investigated further by using Pearson's r, applying a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple correlations. It was found that responses on all three scales, FLCAS, PAS, and ANS, were correlated with each other. Anxiety (FLCAS) was negatively correlated with both autonomy support (PAS, r = -.25, p<.001) and autonomy need satisfaction (ANS, r = -.37, p<.001), suggesting that more anxious children were likely to have lower perceptions of support for autonomy and less likely to feel that their need for autonomy was being met. Autonomy support was positively correlated with autonomy need satisfaction (r = .55, p<.001), suggesting that pupils who felt that teachers provided them with more support for autonomy were more likely to feel that their needs for autonomy were being met.

Findings from the drawings (qualitative data from 107 girls and 57 boys)

When managed appropriately, pairwork helped children to:

● Feel competent and valued
● Feel autonomous and creative
● Practice speaking skills
● Feel less anxiety about speaking in English.

أرسم صورة تعبر فيها عن مرة حسيت بالخوف او القلق لما المدرس طلب منك تكلم انجليزي مع زميلك/ زميلتك. اشرح اية اللي بيحصل في الصورة.

● **Figure 6.** Peers laughing at a child who could not speak correctly

Two main themes emerged from analyzing the drawings: these were, predictably, a) fear of peer pressure; and b) fear of making mistakes.

Peer pressure was caused by peer ridicule when a child made a mistake and by feeling less competent than other children in class. Figure 6 below provides a vivid illustration of peer ridicule during a pairwork speaking activity. In this drawing, the child drew herself in tears while the other children in class were laughing at her because she failed to answer correctly. The child wrote, 'I feel afraid when I don't know how to answer in front of my classmates, and everyone starts laughing at me. Then, I feel *broken*!'

Feeling less competent, in comparison to other peers, was another source of peer pressure. Figure 7 illustrates a child in tears because she could not provide her partner with the correct answer and therefore perceived herself to be 'less' competent, and of a lower

أرسم صورة تعبر فيها عن مرة حسيت بالخوف او القلق لما المدرس طلب منك تكلم انجليزي مع زميلك/ زميلتك. اشرح اية اللي بيحصل في الصورة.

● **Figure 7.** A child in tears for not knowing the correct answer

ارسم صورة تعبر فيها عن مرة حسيت بالخوف او القلق لما المدرس طلب منك تكلم انجليزي مع زميلك/ زميلتك. اشرح اية اللي بيحصل في الصورة.

انا بقول لزميلتي انا خايفة ولكن ممكن تقول لي الإجابة و أنا اكمل

● **Figure 8**. A child being supported by a classmate

status than her partner. The child wrote, 'Rehana, my classmate, asks me about the meaning of a word and I whisper quietly to myself that I don't know the answer.'

Lack of peer support and relatedness, particularly when a child lacked competence or felt anxious, could impact on children's learning in an obstructive way. On the other hand, peer support could help children overcome feelings of 'fear' and 'being stuck'. Figure 8 below illustrates how one child was able to complete a task successfully when she shared her worries with a classmate and received support and reassurance in return. The child wrote: "I tell my classmate that I am afraid, but she helps me and tells me the answer and then I can go on."

Many of the children's drawings illustrated classroom situations during which teachers' actions were perceived to trigger anxiety and fear. The most frequently illustrated situation was that of a fear

الأسم: حنين ابراهيم السيد الفضل... المدرسة يصحى النموذجية ١١٧
ارسم صورة تعبر فيها عن مرة حسيت بالخوف او القلق لما المدرس طلب منك تكلم انجليزي مع زميلك/ زميلتك. اشرح اية اللي بيحصل في الصورة.

انا وصحبتي لمى بيطلب منا ان احنا نتكلم مع بعض جليزي لما المس بتيجي وأقول كلمة غلط بترصيحي في المس بنقول عني وانا مش...

● **Figure 9.** A teacher closely monitoring pairwork

of making mistakes and thus being reprimanded by the teacher or failing to gain the teacher's approval. Children's illustrations revealed how children's participation was often curtailed by the prospect of being unable to provide the correct and expected 'model' response. For example, Figure 9 below shows a teacher monitoring a pairwork speaking activity. The child described her feeling about the teacher's monitoring by saying, '… when the teacher is around and I say one word incorrectly, I start to feel nervous, and I feel that the teacher will think that I am useless.'

Similarly, Figure 10 shows the teacher urging the child to speak in English and the child in tears for fear of the prospect of the teacher's

● **Figure 10.** A child in tears for fear of the teacher's reprimand

● **Figure 11.** A child feeling happy and confident because
of the teacher's support

reprimand. The child commented, 'I feel very afraid, and I stutter because I think that the teacher will shout at me and hit me. Then I cannot speak, and I tremble.'

How teachers monitored pairwork activities and responded to mistakes had effects. Teachers needed to monitor pupils in a supportive, responsive, and non-threatening way, which could mean monitoring from a distance. They needed to embrace and welcome mistakes as learning opportunities rather than intolerable incidents that necessitated punishment. When teachers, directly or indirectly, reinforced the view of mistakes as intolerable and unwelcome, they triggered anxiety and impaired pupils' sense of competence and, therefore, created a classroom atmosphere that was not conducive for learning. On the other hand, when teachers supported pupils' sense of competence, pupils felt happy, reassured, and confident in their ability to learn and succeed. Figure 11 illustrates how a teacher's encouragement and support prompted a child to feel confident to learn and succeed. The child wrote, 'I feel happy because when I can speak well, the teacher has confidence in me, and I feel that I am good at English and will be good in the future.'

Discussion

This article drew on the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT) to investigate primary-school children's social and emotional experiences of anxiety and a sense of agency during lessons for speaking English as a second language (L2). SDT suggests that people can only thrive and learn creatively when they feel sufficiently competent, agentic, and socially related to others. However high quality the textbook or other technical resources, without a teacher who recognizes the fundamental importance of social and emotional issues in the classroom, learning to speak a foreign language will continue to be a particular problem. Our findings have highlighted in particular how children's fear of making mistakes and being subjected to the teacher's reprimand

– and peers' ridicule – could curtail pupils' participation and eventually constrain their ability to develop speaking skills in English. As illustrated in the children's expressive drawings, a child who is in tears, or stuttering, or who feels *broken*, finds it difficult to engage in the lesson, or to learn and grow. On the other hand, a child who feels related to peers and feels competent is more likely to be happy and confident to participate willingly and learn eagerly during class time and beyond.

It became clear in our findings, as anticipated by extant literature, that the individual's experience of anxiety during English-speaking lessons could impede their attempts to speak in English. As one child expressed, 'Fear is the biggest obstacle, fear that the other pupils in the class will laugh at me or that the teacher gets upset with me.' The FALCS survey suggested that pupils most often felt anxious when making mistakes. Lack of one's perceived competence was evidently related to anxiety, but lack of perceived autonomy and relatedness were also obstructive. Because attainment in exams was the main driving force behind classroom behaviors, children who struggled with English were constantly reminded of their lack of *competence*, which appeared to provoke anxiety. This curtailment of a sense of competence, leading to increased anxiety, was unsurprising in a context where the teacher conveyed that making mistakes was a negative event. However, it was striking to note that the scale item with the lowest mean score for anxiety was that relating to working in pairs, suggesting that pairwork was less anxiety-provoking for pupils.

Some implications for classroom practice

With regard to using pairwork in the classroom, our findings illustrate that when carried out sensitively, pairwork reduced anxiety and increased a sense of agency, often through relatedness to the community. However, teachers needed to pay careful attention to how pairs were formed so that children were working with a partner whom they liked and trusted. If

they failed to do this, a child's peers could be just as anxiety-provoking as their teachers. While a culture of competitiveness and meritocracy existed in classrooms, pairwork sought to adapt the learning process to focus more on attending to human rights, gender equality, and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence.

Teachers also needed to make sure that they did not inhibit children's speaking of English by monitoring their performance in a direct way by pointing out mistakes or even hovering too close to a couple engaged in dialogue. Again, attention to this detail was made particularly important, given the pervading classroom emphasis on reaching correct answers and proving oneself better than others, rather than on promoting a culture of peace and equality which might indeed be facilitated more easily through pairwork.

Findings from this research have also highlighted children's capacity for reflecting on their learning and have suggested ways to improve it. We strongly recommend that teachers recognize this capacity and draw on it to increase children's expression of autonomy and their decision-making over how they learn: a manifestation of respect for their human rights as children. It is often the case that young learners' voices are overlooked, especially in educational contexts where there is greater emphasis on teachers' performance rather than learning processes. This denies teachers the knowledge and understandings of their pupils' actual needs and hampers their ability to establish effective learning environments and use classroom activities that are responsive and conducive to young learners' linguistic development and feelings of well-being.

We propose that teachers and materials writers can devise simple activities to find out what children think and feel, which could be easily integrated in everyday classroom teaching and learning routines. Next, teachers would need to adjust their teaching to respond to identified learners' needs. When learners

feel that their voice matters and that their suggestions are integrated into classroom teaching and learning activities, they are more likely to feel engaged and motivated to learn. To fulfil this requirement, teachers also need to ask for feedback from their learners, and to build opportunities in the classroom to observe learners while they complete tasks and take notice of their engagement across a wide range of tasks and classroom situations, always looking out for how the needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are being met. Materials writers can include more pairwork and also – very importantly – more support for teachers on how to manage pairwork, as well as on how to attend to the construction of a social and emotional learning environment that is conducive to learning.

Our findings have highlighted the benefit of children experiencing autonomy in their learning. Based on this, we propose that teachers should:

- Organize pairwork *among all children at the same time,* so that each pair feels comfortable with each other and thereby has anxiety-free space to experiment with speaking, following efficient teacher modelling of the activity;
- Encourage children to reflect on what helps them learn to speak best and give them opportunities to act on their individual preferences; and
- Allow children to tell them when they have grasped what they are learning before moving on to new topics.

Drawing on these findings, we propose that teachers:

- Draw on their own autonomy by acting as models themselves of enjoying the challenge of trying to speak, even if teachers' own English is not fluent;
- Encourage children by seeing them as equal, fellow English speakers in the classroom community and engaging in English conversation with them when possible;

- Avoid threats of punishment for children making mistakes in speaking and, instead, notice and praise improvements in speaking *fluency* rather than *accuracy*;
- Avoid labelling children as 'strong' or 'weak' and instead treat all children as potentially competent, self-directed, and sociable learners;
- Use open-ended questions and tasks that allow children to decide on more than one correct/acceptable answer. This will allow teachers to give feedback on content and ideas as well as allowing the child to draw on their own agency.

The two cartoon illustrations are by Lucy Hunt.

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II

Talk globally, learn locally:

Interculturalizing the Palestinian English Curriculum through weekly online link-ups with a volunteer in another country

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The Hands up Project

Abstract

The advent of localized coursebooks for the teaching of English as a foreign language in schools has been an important landmark in the decentring of the English language teaching industry. This has raised the status of local varieties of English and local ELT specialists and authors, emphasized the learning of grammar and vocabulary that is specific to the needs of the local community, and, perhaps most importantly, aimed to facilitate the learning of the language by using familiar contexts and therefore easily accessible content. Such coursebooks are often organized with the principles of the communicative approach in mind, and include interesting and context-specific reading and listening texts and tasks, as well as communicative speaking activities that are designed to give learners the opportunity to use their developing English in meaningful ways. However, our experience working with teachers of large classes in Palestine using the coursebook *English for Palestine* suggests that such activities are often skipped by classroom teachers who are under pressure to cover the curriculum and prepare for the

entirely accuracy-focused written exams. It is also debatable whether teenagers are motivated to talk in English about daily routines, their homes, etc., with people who share the same L1 and who they've known all their lives. In this chapter, we explore whether linking such classes to a remote volunteer for weekly intercultural exchange, related to the themes and language areas of the coursebook, can help motivate young Palestinian learners of English in Gaza to try to use their English more communicatively, to develop their confidence, and ultimately increase their motivation to study the language.

Introduction

The Hands up Project (HUP) is a UK-registered educational charity that, since 2015, has connected children in classrooms in Palestine to a team of volunteer facilitators around the world for online storytelling, drama, and conversation in English. Unlike many other online teaching systems that are primarily focused on having a remote teacher who is in charge, HUP has always worked with the idea of team-teaching: a Palestinian teacher in the room with the learners and a remote volunteer connecting via Zoom, together creating a shared learning experience for the children. We believe that this makes our work unique.

We have plenty of anecdotal evidence for the value of these sessions in terms of the young people's increased confidence, enhanced communicative competence, and improved attitudes towards English. However, until recently the sessions have usually been attended mainly by smaller groups of children (fewer than 25) who already have some English skills and are keen to learn more. They have also mainly been extra-curricular sessions, not focused on the coursebook, *English for Palestine*.

In November 2022, we embarked on an experiment where over a period of eight weeks, two classes of grade 9 girl students (aged 13–14) and two classes of grade 9 boy students of the same age, at two Ministry of Education (MOE) schools in Gaza, attended weekly

40-minute online zoom sessions with Nick Bilbrough, the founder of the Hands up Project, connecting remotely. His image was projected onto the classroom wall and his voice amplified through a speaker, but he could only hear the voices or clearly see the faces of students who came up to the computer webcam to interact with him. The regular classroom teacher was in the room with the children throughout all the sessions and was able to support and facilitate any interaction with Nick. There were 48 to 50 students in each of the four classes and the sessions lasted for one 40-minute class a week out of the total weekly amount of five classes of English. As in all other non-private schools in Palestine, the students were working through their English coursebook, *English for Palestine*, and these sessions were designed to bring an intercultural dimension to the topics and language focus they were studying.

In Gaza, 95% of young people have never left the strip and have no prospect of ever leaving. The vast majority have never used their English communicatively in a face-to-face context and – perhaps of even greater concern – they do not believe that they ever will. Recent unpublished research carried out in MOE schools in Gaza has shown that there is consequently a widespread lack of motivation amongst learners and teachers to study English and to use course materials.

With limited time and resources on the part of the teacher, we wanted to explore whether weekly intercultural online connections with a remote volunteer could have a positive impact on students' levels of motivation and confidence. We researched this by providing a motivation and confidence questionnaire to be completed by the control groups and the experimental groups immediately before and immediately after the intervention. The control groups consisted of two female grade 8 classes and two male grade 8 classes (13–14 years old), each of roughly 50 students, who were taught at the same time, by the same teacher using the same materials. The four experimental group classes had exactly the same conditions (same school, class size, materials, and teacher) the only difference being that for one 40-minute session a week (one-fifth

of their weekly English class time) the whole class linked online to Nick for intercultural online activities related to the themes of their coursebook.

Differences between the answers of the 'before' and 'after' questionnaires are currently being analyzed by our research team and will be published elsewhere later. What follows here is an account of the activities we did to interculturalize the coursebook, a few transcripts of actual interactions that took place, and reflections from Nick and the learners about how things went. All names of students have been changed to protect their identities.

Unit 4: How to get healthy

We were fortunate having this unit as a starting point for our weekly online zoom link-ups. It seemed very universal in its

● **Figure 1:** *English for Palestine*, grade 8, unit 4: How to get healthy

theme but also to have the potential for some interesting cross-cultural dialogue, since what is considered healthy isn't entirely the same amongst different communities around the world. The unit aims to teach vocabulary related to healthy or unhealthy diet and activities, as well as structures for giving advice (*You'd better, Why don't you*, etc.) plus the present perfect continuous tense for repeated recent actions.

In discussion and agreement with the teachers in Gaza we conducted the following activities in our online weekly 40-minute sessions with each of the four classes.

Week 1: Nick showed ten personal pictures relating to his healthy/unhealthy lifestyle in the U.K. and talked about them. He then asked students, in groups, to remember what they could of what he'd said. Different students then took turns to come up to the webcam and say what they could remember about Nick's lifestyle. Through the screen, as many students as possible then showed Nick their own personal pictures, which they had brought from home, and had a discussion about how healthy their own lifestyles were.

Week 2: For 5–10 minutes at the beginning of each class we linked to a similar-aged girl or boy in Bosnia, Germany, and/or Romania and they asked each other questions about their lifestyles. Some students performed or read out stories that they had prepared, relating to an unhealthy/healthy day and, whilst reading, mimed actions to go with their stories. In some cases, the students read out the story whilst Nick simultaneously mimed actions to represent what was being said. The class ended by Nick showing them three sentences about himself in the present perfect continuous tense. Two were true and one was a lie. A few students came up to the webcam and asked Nick questions to try to work out which sentence wasn't true.

Week 3: The students had created and memorized paired dialogues on the theme of giving advice. In the session, they took it in turns to perform them to Nick who awarded a prize of books for what he judged to be the best acted performance. We then played the 'two truths and a lie' game the other way around,

where students took it in turns to come to the webcam and read the three present perfect continuous sentences that they had prepared. By asking questions, Nick had to try to work out where the lie was. We did this as a competition, with Nick getting a point for each time he guessed the lie correctly and the student team getting a point every time he failed.

The extract below is from the final iteration in one of the boys' groups of the last-mentioned activity above.

1	*Mohammad*:	I have been playing at the mobile. I have studying very well. I have been playing football every day and love it.
2	*Nick (laughing)*:	Ha ha, great… So, number 3… You've been playing football every day and you love it? Number 1, what was it? Can you repeat number 1?
3	*Mohammad*:	I have been playing at the mobile.
4	*Nick (nodding)*:	Aha… And number 2?
5	*Mohammad*:	I have been studying very well.
6	*Nick*:	Okay, alright, so when you play on your mobile, what do you play?
7	*Mohammad (hesitantly)*:	Uh, play car games.
8	*Nick*:	Car games, okay.
9	*Nick*:	Okay and um how long have you had your mobile phone?
10	*Mohammad*	*(looking at the teacher and saying in Arabic)*: WHAT, TEACHER?
11	*Nick (again)*:	How long have you had it?
12	*Mohammad*:	One or two clocks.
13	*The teacher and some of the students in the class*:	Hours!
14	*Mohammad (nodding)*:	Hour in days.
15	*Nick*:	Oh, you play on your mobile phone for one hour

or two hours every day. Okay, one or two hours every day. Okay, um oh what was number 2? I've forgotten. Sorry, what was number 2?

16 *Mohammad*: I have been studying very well.

17 *Nick*: Which subjects have you been studying? English?

18 *Mohammad (asking the teacher)*: Which subject?

19 *Nick*: Which subjects? English?

20 *The teacher (in Arabic):* LISTEN TO HIS QUESTION, HE IS SAYING TO YOU: Is it English?

21 *Ahmad (asking Nick)*: English?

22 *The teacher (in Arabic)*: HE IS ASKING YOU IS IT ENGLISH? He is saying English or not?

23 *Mohammad (in Arabic, looking at the teacher)*: WHAT? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

24 *The teacher (in Arabic)*: WHAT IS THE SUBJECT THAT YOU ARE STUDYING?

25 *Mohammad*: All, all.

26 *Nick*: All subjects? English, mathematics, science, everything?

27 *Mohammad (carrying on)*: Arabic.

28 *The teacher (walking in the class)*: Geography.

29 Mohammad: Technology, all, all.

30 *Nick*: We'll have to ask your teachers if that's true or not (*laughing*). Have you been studying all the time for a long time? Have you been studying for a long time?

31 *Mohammad*: No.

32 *Nick*: Just recently?

33 *Mohammad (in Arabic)*: WHAT?

34 *Nick*: Recently?

35 *Mohammad (hesitantly)*: Yes.

36 *Nick*: Okay, and what's number 3 again? Tell me number 3.

37 *Mohammad*: I have been (*hesitantly*), I have been playing football and love it.

38 *Nick*: Oh, and you love it. I think that's true. I can see in your face that you love football. I think number 3 is true. I think that number 2 is true. I think number 1 is false.

39 *Mohammad (triumphantly)*: No!

40 *Nick (loudly)*: No?

41 *Mohammad (laughing out loud)*: Number 3.

42 *Nick (surprised)*: Number 3, really? You don't like football?

43 *Mohammad*: Yes, I don't love football.

44 *Nick*: Wow! Not at all? Okay, well done! Brilliant! Fantastic, so that means Gaza team are the winners.

45 *The teacher*: Yes.

46 *Mohammad (proudly)*: Yes!

47 *Nick (holding the white board close to the camera)*: Three … two!

Nick's reflections

One of the things I particularly like about this activity is that it provides an opportunity for some nice, controlled, personalized practice of an area

of grammar (in this case, Ahmed's statements about himself using the present perfect continuous) at the same time as freer practice in other areas of language that help to reinforce the meaning of the grammar (the Q & A session to try to work out where the lie is).

I also like the fact that the game element makes it motivating for both parties. Mohammad was particularly excited at his ability to beat me and by the fact that he was the person who won the whole game for the students.

It's interesting that I chose not to recast his incorrect utterances in line 1 ('I have been playing at the mobile. I have studying very well') even though they were actually the main language focus of the activity. I'm not entirely sure why I didn't do this, but I think it was probably because I feel that Mohammad, though one of the strongest students in the class in terms of knowledge of English, is actually heavily lacking in confidence in his ability to speak. It is even more interesting that in line 6 Mohammad gets it right himself without any input from me or the teacher: 'I have been studying very well.' This could indicate that he just made a slip the first time and that he already has a good awareness of the form of the present perfect continuous.

Mohammad's reflections

Before the first session, I felt that it would be pointless to do this because I wouldn't be able to understand anything. I love the English class, but I don't like the act of learning English in particular because it is the language of the people who brought the occupation to us. After doing the link-ups, I started to feel that there is goodness in this world and not all those people are evil. I also started to feel much more comfortable. I loved the competitions and the activities were very motivating.

He was deliberately slowing down and if I didn't know that he is a native speaker, I would have thought that he is a second language learner like us. This has fostered confidence in me to believe in my own ability to speak to people from outside. I'll also never forget that we beat him in the game!

Unit 5: People and games

As with the previous unit, the theme is potentially interesting and engaging for young people, and you would expect the opportunities for intercultural dialogue in our online link-ups to be very good. This potential was made even greater by the fact that the three weeks that we worked with this material were exactly when the 2022 World Cup in Qatar was happening and many of the young people in Palestine, as well as the teachers and Nick, were watching it avidly. Throughout the whole period there was lots of unplanned chat around who was doing well in the World Cup and which teams students wanted to win.

2 Read and mark the sentences true (✔) or false (✗).

1 Games with teams that compete are not just a modern idea. ☐
2 Long ago, games used to have clear rules. ☐
3 Players from just one team decided the rules of the game. ☐
4 Today, people round the world love football more than any other game. ☐
5 Schools do sports to give their pupils a rest and some fun. ☐

Work in pairs. Check your answers and correct the false ones.

People and games

1 People have been playing team games since ancient times. But why? Well, people have always loved to be part of a great team, to compete their hardest with others, and to win, too.

We still love our games, but games have changed. They have changed because now there are clear rules. These make everything about a game clear to everyone.

5 Take football, for example. In the past, hundreds of people sometimes played for days. There were no 'rights' and 'wrongs' – and matches were not very safe, either: players often kicked each other more than the ball! Then, in 1863,
10 players from different teams met, decided the rules together, and invented the modern game.

The rules have helped to make football the world's favourite sport. People everywhere understand it and play it. So at any time someone somewhere in the world is scoring a goal.

That someone is often a young player in a school game. But why play football at school? Well,
15 many people think that sport helps to make us better people, and so games are an important part of school life in many countries. They include football and other games like volleyball and basketball, and teams from different schools compete hard to win. When they do, everyone down to the smallest pupil is proud and excited!

● Figure 2: *English for Palestine*, grade 8, unit 5: People and games

The reading activity below lies midway through the unit and is included in the book to provide learners with an opportunity to process a theme-related reading passage and to engage in discussion in the follow-up speaking task.

The text is useful and interesting. However, it is doubtful whether many teachers will be able to do this task in class in the way it was intended, for the following reasons. Firstly, many students in Palestine will have translated the entire text and probably also the questions into Arabic before the class (whole books are commercially available in Palestine to enable students to do this), making the process of reading to try to understand completely redundant. Secondly, if everything has already been translated there can be no debate about what the correct answers to the questions are. This makes the follow-up pairwork discussion task redundant too.

So, for this unit we wanted to include some online activities for our link-ups that could make up for the fact that the activities in the coursebook could almost certainly not be done in the way they had been designed. We wanted to give the learners some opportunities to use English to communicate, to understand other people's sport and game culture, and to share their own and, most importantly perhaps, to make some mistakes and not feel inhibited or threatened by this. This is what we came up with.

Week 1: We began the session by linking to a similar-aged boy in Bosnia and Spain and a girl in Romania. They had a discussion about their favorite sports and video games. In order to set up the Students versus Teachers activity, which was going to take place the following week, Nick modeled it by showing a few questions himself and running it as a kind of quiz. The class scored a point if they got a question right and Nick scored a point if they got a question wrong. Some example questions were:

How many different pieces are there in a chess game?
a) 6   b) 7   c) 8

Which country has a professional football team called 'Palestino'?
a) Chile   b) Italy   c) Algeria

In the last part of each class, a few students came up to the webcam and chatted with Nick about their favorite sports and video games.

Week 2: Nick did a short presentation about one of the remaining countries in the 2022 World Cup. (He chose Australia.) The main focus of this was on typical sports and games in that country and matches they'd played so far in the competition, but he also focused briefly on food, landscape, and religion. Rather than using PowerPoint slides, he held pictures up to the webcam. He also showed the class the notes he'd made on big pieces of paper. The aim of this was to serve as a model for the short presentations they were going to do themselves. He made it really clear that he didn't want them to just read out their presentations but rather to show pictures and talk about them. One representative from each group of five students (10 groups in total) then came up and asked the questions they had prepared for the Students versus Teachers activity. As they did this, they picked a country randomly from the remaining countries to prepare to present about in the following week's session.

Week 3: Each of the 10 groups came up to the webcam and did their presentations about the country they had picked. The extracts below are from one of the girls' classes in the second week of the Students versus Teachers activity.

Hanaa: Who is the best Arabic girl tennis player in 2022?
Nick: Who is the best Arabian? Was it Arabian? Did you say who's the best Arabian tennis player in 2022?
Hanaa: Yes.
Nick: Ooooh (*thinking*). Okay tell me the options.
Hanaa: One.... Rania Elwani, two.... Farida Osman, three..... Ons Jabeur
Nick: Ehhh.... I think it's Rania Omani.
Hanna: No, no, false. Ons Jabeur.
Nick: False.

Teacher and students:
We win! (*showing the score sheet **Gaza team 1 Nick's team 1***)

Nick (smiling):
Okay, who was it then?

Hanaa: Ons Jabeur.

Nick: Okay, Ons Jabeur. Which country? Which country?

Hanaa: She's from Tunisia.

Nick: Ah, from Tunisia. Is she still playing now?

Hanaa (nodding):
Yes.

Nick: Is she very good? She's very good?

Hanaa: Yes.

Nick: Okay, all right, great, excellent question, well done (*moving the slips of paper with the names of the remaining teams in the World Cup between his hands*). Okay, you're going to say stop?

Hanaa: Stop!

Nick (showing a slip of paper to the camera):
Spain! Okay, brilliant. That's your country! Spain!

Hanaa: Okay.

Nick: Hello, how are you?

Nour: Fine, fine, my name is Nour.

Nick: Go on then, Nour, give me your question. Is it easy or difficult?

Nour: What is the traditional Palestinian game for girls?

Nick listening and thinking

Nour: What is the traditional Palestinian game for girls?

Nick: That's a really good question.

Nour: Number 1, *Idrees*. Number 2, arm bowling. Number 3, *Sokkar Bokkar*.

Nick: Can you say them all again please?

Nour: *Idrees* or arm bowling or *Sokkar Bokkar*.

Nick: *Sokkar Hokkar*?

Nour: *Sokkar Bokkar*! (*laughing*)

Nick: I'm going to say *Sokkar Hokkar* because I like the sound of it.

Nour (big smile):
Yes.

Nick: Is it right?

*Nour (holds up the score sheet **Gaza team 1 Nick's team 2**)*:
Two for you!

Nick: What is *Sokkar Hokkar*? What is it? (*Nour leaves and two other girls approach the screen*) Come back! Come back! What is *Sokkar Hokkar*? What is it? (*The two girls at the screen start demonstrating the clapping game whilst doing the accompanying chant in Arabic*) Ah okay. Wow! That's a game that you play in schools in Palestine?

The teacher:
No, it's for fun.

Nick: Yeah, yeah, like in the break, you play this?

Girls: Yes.

Nick: Wow! Who plays it? Boys don't play it? Only girls? (*We lose the connection.*)

Nick's reflections

Students versus Teachers has become a staple Hands up Project activity in online sessions. Doing it in such a large class requires lots of planning and a lot of work in terms of research outside of class for the students (which I think is one of its strengths). I like the way both Hanaa and Nour asked me something which showed up my lack of knowledge about sport and games in the Arab world. Ons Jabeur is currently ranked #2 in the world in women's tennis and yet I'd never heard of her. Nor had I heard of the other two athletes she mentioned. There are a lot of prejudiced views in the U.K. media about attitudes towards women doing sport in the Arab world, but those girls showed me how proud they are of their sportswomen.

I loved the moment when two girls came up to the webcam and showed me how the clapping game Sokkar Bokkar worked. It was so heartwarming and reminded me of a time many years ago, watching girls

playing similar games at my primary school in the U.K. I was gutted when we lost the connection at such a crucial point.

One of the areas of language focus of this unit is showing interest with intonation (see the activity from the book below). It's interesting how this was presented and practiced throughout our online interactions with People and Games by myself and the students, but particularly in the Students versus Teachers activity. This of course was completely unplanned and only came up because we were genuinely interested in what was being said.

Nour's reflections

I loved how he was using his body language to clarify the meaning of what he was saying. The sessions were of full of joy and fun. My favorite part was when he was using Arabic and saying things like Mashallah. *I felt that sense of belonging to us. For the game, I wanted to choose something related to our culture and I thought it would be a massive challenge*

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2 Practise your pronunciation: showing interest with intonation. 🎧

1 Listen to the conversation again. This time, listen to the expressions Yasmeen uses.
Do they rise (↗) or fall (↘) at the end? Mark them.
So how did you get on? ☐
Was it very hard? ☐
Really! ☐
Really? ☐
Are you serious? ☐
You can't be serious! ☐

2 Now listen again and repeat.

3 Have a conversation about Yasmeen's training. Do these tasks.

1 Take Yasmeen's part. Choose five of the activities and tick (✓) them.
2 Choose the order that you did them and number them 1–5.
3 Work with a partner. Take turns as Yasmeen and Omar. Start like this.

Omar	So how did you get on?
Yasmeen	Well, our training was like yours. We didn't finish for two hours, either.
Omar	Was it very hard, too?
Yasmeen	Yes, it was, but there was one thing different. We stopped to have a rest.
Omar	Really! And so what kinds of training did you do?
Yasmeen	Well, first, we …

● **Figure 3:** *English for Palestine*, grade 8, unit 5: People and games

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for him. I just thought it's impossible for him to know the answer, but surprisingly he did, and I was disappointed!

Unit 6: Friends

The theme of this unit (friendship and talking about feelings) has the potential of course to be highly personalized, with students taking part in speaking and writing activities related to their own lives. However, the coursebook actually includes very few suggested activities to do so, and even those that are personalized seem rather unnatural and contrived to practice particular areas of language, rather than aiming to foster genuine communication.

I wonder whether 13–14-year-old boys or girls would be interested in the task below, or feel entirely comfortable doing it? It's also questionable whether they would be challenged to produce natural, generalizable, and replicable utterances by taking part in such a pairwork activity, especially in a class of 50 learners where it would be impossible for the teacher to monitor every conversation.

In our weekly planning meeting, we decided to make our link-up sessions for this unit much less focused on specific areas of language than for the previous two units, and much more about encouraging personalized, longer speaker turns. This was partly because the theme of the unit lent itself to this, but also because we were running out of time before the end of semester exams

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2 Work in pairs. Ask and answer questions about feelings and actions. Choose from these 'feeling' adjectives.

embarrassed   pleased   scared   upset

What do you (often) do when you're (upset)?

When I'm (upset), I often talk to my parents about the problem.
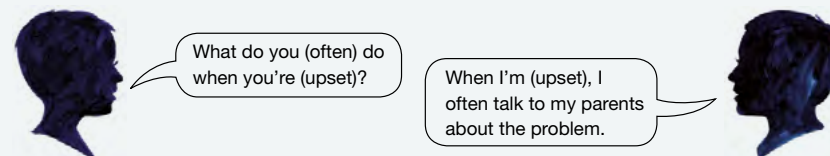
● **Figure 4:** *English for Palestine*, grade 8, unit 6

and wanted to give the students an opportunity to produce as much language as they could (and end on a high note!).

So, as a kind of lead-in to the unit, we asked everyone to bring in a picture of somebody who they felt very close to and to be prepared to talk to Nick about this person in the session. Nick modeled the activity briefly by showing pictures and talking about his own mother. Some of the learners did a piece of writing before the class about their person too, which helped them prepare to speak.

In the extract below, Ahmed, a student who is perhaps less confident about his speaking skills than most students in the class, was speaking about his grandfather.

1 *Ahmed holds up the picture of his grandfather to the webcam and the piece of writing he has done about him.*

2 Nick: Your grandfather! Brilliant. You're going to tell me about your grandfather? Excellent. Okay. So great!

3 *Teacher (in Arabic)*: WITHOUT READING.

4 *Ahmed (in Arabic)*: I HAVEN'T MEMORIZED IT.

5 *Teacher*: Without reading. (*In Arabic*): JUST TELL HIM WHAT HE'S DOING. Just some small points. A few points about him.

6 *Ahmed (thinking hard)*: Ehm. He is. His name Bader.

7 *Nick*: Bader?

8 *Ahmed (nodding)*: Yeah.

9 *Nick*: Okay.

10 *Ahmed*: And eh… he from in Palestine.

11 *Nick*: Yeah. Okay.

12 *Ahmed*: And (*long thinking pause*) eh he eh he eh seven children. Six girls and eh one…one boy.

13 *Nick*: Okay.

14 *Ahmed (long pause)*: Eh…. he passed in… he passed in… away in 2018.

15 *Nick*: Okay. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry (*touching heart with both hands*). I'm sorry.

16 *Ahmed nods*

17 *Nick*: Is he your father's father or your mother's father?

18 *Ahmed*: Yes.

19 *Teacher*: Father's or mother's father?

20 *Ahmed*: Eh… father's father.

21 *Nick*: Your father's father. And eh… what was his job? What was his job?

22 *Ahmed*: Eh… (*thinking hard*) … teacher maths.

23 *Nick*: He was a maths teacher? Really? Wow! In a school?

24 *Ahmed (nodding)*: Yes.

25 *Nick*: For children?

26 *Ahmed (nodding)*: Yes.

27 *Nick*: That's great. Show me the picture of him. Can you show me the picture of him?

28 *Ahmed holds up the picture close up to the webcam.*

29 *Nick*: Wow! He looks so nice. He looks such a nice man. He looks so kind.

30 *Ahmed*: Yeah.

31 *Nick*: So, let me tell you what I remember about your grandfather. You tell me if I'm right, Okay? So, he was called Bader? Bader?

32 *Ahmed*: Yes.

33 *Nick*: And he had seven children.

34 *Ahmed*: Yes.

35 *Nick*: Six daughters and one son.

36 *Ahmed*: Yes.

36 *Nick*: And the son is your father.

37	*Ahmed*:	Yes.
38	*Nick*:	And he died, God rest his soul (*puts hand on heart*). Rest in peace, he passed away in 2018.
39	*Ahmed*:	Yes.
40	*Nick*:	And he was Palestinian.
41	*Ahmed*:	Yes (*nodding*).
42	*Nick*:	And he used to be a maths teacher in a school.
43	*Ahmed*:	Yes.
44	*Nick*:	Do you know… do you know where he was born in Palestine? Do you know where in Palestine he was born?
45	*Teacher (in Arabic)*:	
		WHERE WAS HE BORN?
46	*Ahmed* (*thinking hard*):	Eh…. Hamama.
47	*Nick*:	Hamama? Where's… Is that in…? Where's that? In eh…? Is that in Gaza?
48	*Ahmed*:	No no, Hamama.
49	*Nick*:	Okay, so he moved to Gaza? He moved to Gaza, did he?
50	*Ahmed*:	Yes.
51	*Nick*:	Brilliant. That's so good. That's really excellent. Really good job. Well done!
		A round of applause from the class

Nick's reflections

Before Ahmed spoke, lots of the boys in the class had come up and talked about famous Palestinians and people who were not personally known to them. This was interesting and was certainly a way of sharing cultural knowledge. But, on the other hand, I felt it would be more engaging for everyone if the boys talked about someone in their families or a friend instead. Ahmed was the first person in the class to do this and I was therefore more interested in hearing what was said.

Many of the previous speakers in the class had simply read out their prepared notes about their chosen person. This also made what they were saying less interesting and harder to follow since they were using words that they didn't necessarily feel totally comfortable with or even fully understand. In lines 3–6 it's clear that the classroom teacher strongly encouraged Ahmed to speak without referring to his notes. Ahmed certainly wasn't expecting to have to do this, but he rose to the challenge really well, and by the end was smiling about his achievement.

I felt that using the strategy of reporting back to Ahmed the things he could remember about his grandfather (lines 31–43) was a useful one. Not only did this put the onus on the teacher to be the one who had to remember (usually it's the students who have to do this of course), but it also provided Ahmed with upgraded versions of his own utterances.

Ahmed's reflections

This was my first time to really speak English as I've never had an opportunity before to use English with someone from another country. Doing the tasks helped me to spend time with English. What I love about Nick is that he accepted it if we made mistakes. I think it is normal to make mistakes because this is how we learn.

To prepare for this task, I wrote down what I wanted to say about my grandpa in Arabic. I translated it into English using Google translate and then I wrote down the new words that came up in English to memorize them later. I felt sad when I was talking about my grandpa, but I felt proud that I was able to use the second language to express my feelings to a foreigner. I want to do this again, and the experience has motivated me to spend my summer holidays improving my English.

Unfortunately, we could only do the following week's session with the girls because on the boys' day the school was closed due to bad weather. We adapted and expanded the task from the coursebook above by asking everyone in each of the four classes to prepare to talk about:

A time when I felt …   happy   proud   excited   sad   worried   scared

Nick began the 40-minute session with each class by showing pictures and talking about a time when he felt scared himself – as an 11-year-old boy moving up to secondary school in the U.K.

We think this helped to open the door for the students to be candid about their own experiences. We then spent the rest of the session with the students taking it in turns to come up to the webcam telling lots of stories and expressing lots of emotions. We had stories of pride over managing to memorize the Quran, doing well in a test, or a family member doing well in an exam; stories of anxiety about traffic accidents, fights with siblings, missing family members who had gone to live abroad; and tragic stories about losing a loved one to cancer, and the bombing of the next-door neighbor's house.

In the extract below, Malak talks about how happy she felt when her father returned from going on the Hajj to Mecca.

Malak: When my father come back… when my father came back from Mecca I was happy.

Nick: Okay. Sorry when he came back from where?

Malak: Mecca.

Nick: Mecca.

Malak: *Il Hajj.*

Nick: Yeah, he went on the Hajj to Mecca?

Malak: Yeah.

Nick: Great. How long did he go for?

Malak: One… one month.

Nick: He went for one month, okay, so, uh, when did he come back?

Malak: Last year. Last year.

Nick: So, he went to Mecca for one month and then he came back?

Malak: Yes.

Nick: So you must… you must have missed him a lot?

Malak: Yeah.

Nick: That's great. Did he go alone to Mecca? Did he go alone?

Malak. Yeah.

Nick: And, um, did he bring anything back for you, to give you? Did he bring you a present?

Malak (consulting the teacher in Arabic about how to say 'rings'):
Yes, ring… ring and toys.

Nick: He brought you some toys? (*mimes ring*) You mean a ring for the finger?

Malak: Yes, ring.

Nick: Oh nice… Wow! So, I'm not… I don't understand exactly but does everybody have to go to Mecca once in their life?

Malak: Yes, yes, in Islam, yeah.

Nick: In Islam. So, will you go to Mecca?

Malak: No.

Nick: In the future? (*future gesture*)

Malak: Yes.

Nick: In the future, yeah, okay. How did he go to Mecca?

Malak: Plane.

Nick: Aeroplane? Okay, wow!

Malak: Plane from Egypt.

Nick: Okay, yeah. It must be very expensive, right? To go to Mecca?

Malak: A lot.

Nick: A lot, yeah. Okay, thank you so much Malak for telling me that.

Nick's reflections

As with Ahmed in the previous extract, I like the fact that Malak becomes an authority on something about which I don't know very much – in this case the Hajj. In keeping with the ideas of Charles Curran, the inventor of Community Language Learning (CLL), the teacher's and my role as more advanced speakers of English (the 'knowers', as Curran termed it) is simply to provide language models for the things the learner chooses to express. (Curran 1973)

I was conscious during this whole conversation that the teacher in the room with the learners was next to Malak and was often translating what I was saying and, at some points, feeding her language that she could say to me. Of course, this is useful sometimes, since feedback and input

'at the point of need' is often more accessible and memorable than post-performance support and feedback. However, when I watch the recording, I'm also wondering if sometimes more time could be given to Malak to process what I'm saying and to formulate her own responses. Without this challenge, maybe things are a little too easy for any kind of long-lasting learning to take place.

It interests me that in this short extract (less than three minutes), such a range of structures that are presented in English for Palestine *are used naturally and in a personalized context, where they are interdependent on each other. These structures include past simple 'wh-' and yes/no questions, past simple statements with time expressions, 'have to' for obligation, 'must' for deduction, and 'will' for future plans. Of course, Malak doesn't use them all herself but she is at least exposed to them and the fact that they relate to her own story may make them more readily memorable. I wonder how much of the curriculum could emerge naturally by learners simply being engaged in talking with people.*

Malak's reflections

It was the happiest moment in my life when my dad came back from Mecca, and I felt so proud. That's why I wanted to share it with someone else. I wasn't scared when I was talking about it to someone that I don't really know because he showed me that he is part of that feeling. He was involved with me when I was telling him that and asking me questions. I think we were learning a lot by doing these kinds of games and activities. Those sessions were very engaging, and I want to do them again.

Conclusions

As stated previously, the results of our randomized control study research will be published in detail elsewhere. Suffice to say here that there was no significant improvement in terms of exam results, but a marked improvement in both motivation and confidence for the students who took part in the weekly Hands up link-ups (particularly in motivation and particularly for girls). Interestingly, the improvement for motivation was true and roughly the same for every quintile of the experimental groups according to their initial exam results. Another important finding was that the increase in motivation was not dependent on the students actually having interacted with Nick at the front. We do not have enough data to confirm this 100% but our study suggests that simply being in a classroom where online intercultural interactions are taking place can increase motivation.

All the control groups actually went down in terms both of motivation and confidence. This may be attributed to the fact that all the students had just taken a fairly important end of semester exam right before the second questionnaire was completed, the negative impact of which was perhaps mitigated by those who had had the benefit of doing online link ups.

It is disappointing that we cannot show that doing Hands up link-ups has any impact on exam results, as this may have been useful in terms of convincing policy-makers, school principals and parents of the value of doing Hands up sessions. On the other hand, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect that there would be any impact: the exams are entirely accuracy-based and do not focus in any way on a communicative use of English. We set out to show that doing Hands up project link-ups was possible in very large classes that were focused on the coursebook, with learners who were not necessarily interested in learning English. Our quantitative research, and the qualitative feedback from some of the learners who took part, shows that it is not only possible, but that the process increased learners' confidence in using English and their motivation to study it. This has implications for learners of English in many similar contexts around the world.

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12

Teaching sustainability topics in English in Mali

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Abstract

This paper concerns teaching English as a foreign or additional language in Mali. It gives an overview of English language learning in a context of diverse national languages and other foreign languages, including English, in the curriculum. The paper looks at the challenge of using L2 textbooks (English) as an issue that is common in most low- and middle-income countries where textbooks fail to provide a noticeable pedagogy for teaching a particular subject. The official materials and books focus on grammatical concepts and irrelevant contexts rather than practical inputs, which often leads teachers – who are less confident, less skilled and less experienced – to feel marginalized. The paper considers teachers and students as change agents for sustainable development. This can happen when teachers dare to introduce innovative approaches in connection with their national curricula, and furthermore work with teachers' associations. Getting teachers to develop their own textbooks is an effective way to address content issues if there is a gap between the syllabus and students' realities.

The linguistic landscape

Mali is a vast country in the Sahel region of West Africa and has a diverse cultural background. Due to its history, Mali has many ethnic groups and minority communities. The country is divided into eight administrative regions. Thus, every region has two or more dominant ethnic groups with their own languages. There are 13 dominant languages, but other minority languages are also spoken. French is the official language and additional languages like English, German, and Russian are spoken. These additional languages are taught and learned at school, and are spoken by the minority elite and scholars.

Although French is the official language and there are multiple national languages, Bamanankan remains the lingua franca. From the point of view of the number of speakers and the political functions, we notice a big imbalance: French has maximum status but very restricted uses, while Bamanankan (officially recognized, like 12 other languages, all of them practiced in very diverse ways) is the national language and is used by more than 80% of the population (Cécile, 1996).

English as a foreign or additional language in secondary schools

In Mali, learning English is compulsory for all students at secondary school, who take English for three years of junior secondary school, from the age of 13. The objectives below will help understand the context of English teaching.

The overall aims of English teaching at junior secondary school are as follows:

- Provide learners with effective means of communication and as an adequate working tool;
- Bring learners up to a fluent and correct level of speaking and writing.

The specific objectives state that by the end of junior secondary school learners of English should be:

- aware of the role and importance of speaking;
- aware of the social function of the language;
- able to use structure and vocabulary to communicate effectively;
- able to discuss the themes of the textbook;
- able to get specific information from the texts dealing with the studied themes.

At senior secondary level, English becomes more important in language classes than in science classes. At this level, the syllabus focuses on a Competency Based Approach (CBA), whereby topics become more about sustainability and global issues to develop students' problem-solving skills. The CBA is based on more collaboration, problem-solving tasks, with a differentiated pedagogy (in a mixed ability class). The three core competences are:

- Understand and use spoken English in different situations;
- Read different types of texts;
- Write different types of text (essay, letter, postcard, article, or form).

Sustainability topics and global issues in secondary school syllabuses and textbooks

In consideration of the above objectives, teaching sustainability topics becomes challenging and opaque for teachers at junior secondary school. They receive no initial teacher training at training institutes and are not trained to integrate sustainability into their teaching as part of any Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Textbooks are another key issue for teachers and their students. At senior secondary level, students are aged about 17–20 and aim to attend university after passing the Baccalaureate exam. However, there is no official textbook. When it comes to reading materials,

teachers have to find any available resources. So, getting reading materials at senior secondary depends largely on what the teacher can access easily. The most common resources for teachers are English language websites and *Mapel* (*Manuel d'Appui aux Professeurs et Elèves du Lycée, TLL-TAL-TSECO-TSEXP-TSE,* no date), a book by O. Christophe Sanou, a Malian teacher of English, which some teachers share with colleagues. This issue does not concern only English, but also other subjects such as German. It is very difficult to think that there are no official designed textbooks for senior secondary, given the high-stake exam students have to take. But this is how teachers have to manage their classes.

At grade 12, students take the Baccalaureate exam, a national assessment required to access university. In their studies, they are mostly given topics about their own country or the world. The intention is to provide them with a broad vision of the world and universal values. Therefore, the topics in senior secondary include unemployment, migration, women's rights, promotion of new and renewable energy, war and peace, citizenship education, biodiversity, and population growth. However, the syllabus for grades 10 and 11 does not cover sustainability, which is only found in grade 12. To me, not teaching sustainability topics in grades 10–11 is a gap, in which a solid foundation for learners' awareness of sustainability should be taught. This was what I tried out with my learners in the past few years.

When a teacher has to teach the topic of migration, s/he might give a research question about the topic in advance, followed by a classroom discussion. Questions might be as follows:

- What do you think migration is?
- Where do your local young people migrate to?
- What do you think motivates them to go?
- What are some advantages and disadvantages of migration?
- What can you do to stop young migration in your community?

Later, teachers can give students a writing or speaking task to express their opinions about migration. To consolidate students' knowledge about the topic, teachers provide reading materials from *Mapel*.

In grade 12, the topic of peace and war has a significance for raising students' awareness of war and the importance of peace as a key pillar of sustainable development. Students have a strong interest in this topic because of its relevance to their context. In Mali, before 2012, students in their teens did not understand war and its consequences. They had heard about war but had not faced it directly. They did not therefore understand what war or military conflict can lead to. Since 2012, Mali has been a victim of terrorism, beginning when the separatist Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) claimed independence for the region of Azawad. Since then, terrorism has prevented thousands of children from going to school. All students in senior school are aware of this big issue.

As the English syllabus includes peace and war, students in grade 12 are given classroom tasks such as discussing:

- What is war?
- What are the consequences of war?
- What are the similarities and differences between war and terrorism?
- How is terrorism affecting your country?
- What do think peace is?
- What do you think is the necessity of peace in your country, in the world?
- How can you bring back peace in your country?

At junior secondary school (grades 7–9, 13–17 years old), students have textbooks. The textbook required by the education department is *English for French Speaking Africa* (EFSA Pupil's Book 5 and 6), by Mills, Zodéougan, and Doust (published in 1972). The contents are mainly focused on texts and grammar summaries. Teachers give comprehension questions and help their students to develop reading skills and understand the grammar points of the texts. The teachers' guides provide step by step instructions on how to teach vocabulary, survival dialogues that focus on language functions (introduction, asking for and giving direction, description), reading and grammar.

The textbook topics include the following:

- Description of a place or a person;
- Going to work;
- A car crash;
- An elephant hunt.

These textbooks have been used in junior secondary schools since 1980, leading to a whole host of gaps, including a lack of innovative pedagogy, lack of solid academic competence, and a lack of relevance to social issues in a rapidly changing world. Most of the topics are not relevant to students' real needs, such as digitalization, sustainability challenges, and the climate crisis. In addition to the lack of relevance of the textbooks, the lack of availability is a major issue that needs to be addressed. At junior secondary, for example, geography has one book per 2.8 students, history and English have one book per 1.7 to 1.8 students (MEN, 2011). These figures vary according to region and the district of Bamako. Similar remarks have been made by Pearce, Fourmy, and Kovach, who report that in core subjects there may be only one textbook for up to 10 pupils. Other teaching materials are virtually non-existent (Pearce, Fourmy, & Kovach, 2009).

Integrating sustainability and global issues in the classroom

I have been teaching in Dioïla for 10 years, with five years as supervisor and teacher trainer, where schools offer less than comfortable learning conditions. We have large classes (50–62 students) where students learn in challenging circumstances. Similar to most junior schools in Mali, the schools have no

electricity. At one of my schools there is no tree for students to find shade. From April to June (the dry season) the temperature varies from 39 to 43°C. Consequently, many students drop out of school. The temperature has been increasing noticeably in the past decade due to climate change.

Another big and related issue affecting the local community is deforestation. Most of the students' parents are farmers. After the three-month rainy season, many of the parents turn to producing charcoal. They use charcoal for family needs and also sell large quantities to wholesalers who resell it in Bamako and to other wholesalers and retailers. Most families in Bamako use charcoal and wood for cooking, because the cost of electricity and gas is very high. In recent years, due to human activity, the dense forest of Baoulé has become an unfamiliar sight, with few trees. This deforestation has impacted wildlife in a serious way and many species have disappeared, where years ago the forest was a good place for wildlife like elephants, lions, and hyenas. Deforestation has also drastically affected rainfall and crops. Besides all this, local peasants have been living with the anxiety of food insecurity for a decade. These are the realities that our students should learn about and our textbooks and learning materials should focus on.

As language teachers, our role is to raise awareness among the young generation about the climate crisis and to help them develop the necessary skills to solve their problems. To bridge the gaps between students' real problems, the syllabus and the textbooks, I launched a project in which I began writing my own materials with content dealing with environmental issues that affect learners' communities. Regardless of textbook content, sub-standard facilities, or whether students are being taught in an unfamiliar 'prestige language', a good teacher who deeply cares about their students can create magic, even in the most difficult of situations. Even if you lack power and agency to influence many of these bigger issues, there is much that can be done in your own classroom (Sowton, 2021). I taught the content in my own classes, both at junior school and senior school. It helped students to develop the skills of protecting their environment, anticipating and solving problems, and teamwork.

Environmental education can improve academic performance, enhance critical thinking skills, and develop life skills (NAAEE). My students have demonstrated competences in response to the environment lessons. They have planted trees and worked in groups of four to seven to protect trees from animals, as the schoolyard had no fence. Keeping trees alive became a competition for the groups. They have collaborated closely to raise young plants, which they water every day, including the holidays. It is worth understanding how the students have come to such achievements. After an environmental lesson on the topic of 'Protecting the forest' my grade 12 students wrote a letter to the school administration for permission to plant trees at school. At first, the school administrators refused to authorize this, as it was not a requirement of the education authorities. However, the students told the administration that after an environmental lesson they felt it was compulsory to plant trees as their contribution to protecting the earth. Positive change in the students' vision and attitude promotes education for sustainable development.

At this point, it is worth stating briefly an issue among headteachers and teachers regarding integrating sustainability in the classroom. At some schools, headteachers were not open to the idea, believing that their role is to require a teacher to submit her/his lesson plan to check if it meets the syllabus requirements. If it does not, it should not be taught. This was the issue I encountered myself. Moreover, some teachers also thought it was a waste of time when dealing with a crowded syllabus in a short time and preparing students for exams and final assessment. They were not flexible about teaching sustainability topics even though they recognized the relevance. To solve the issue, I had discussions with reluctant headteachers, explaining that the purpose of education is to prepare learners to be able to solve issues they might face instead of focusing only on the content that might not always be relevant. The climate crisis concerns the whole of humanity, leading to drought, floods and

other related problems that affect Mali as a West Sahel country. Every learner needs to develop competences to tackle the climate crisis. This helped to persuade headteachers to change their mind. It also helped us get their support for the tree-planting project.

Later, our local teachers' association offered training to 25 members in how to integrate sustainability topics and global issues in their teaching.

As teachers, we need to understand that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) encourages students to be better citizens through lessons on leadership education, enhancing socio-emotional skills, and helping students to become informed global citizens and the leaders of tomorrow (see Global Schools Program Advocates Toolkit[1]). In addition, my materials have improved students' academic competence as they learned grammar lessons in a more contextualized approach, using vocabulary that they need in their daily lives. At junior secondary school, many teachers teach in a traditional grammar-based approach, spending whole sessions on teaching grammar. This approach in reality is counterproductive and demotivating for students. This statement is not a simple assertion, but is based on my experience of working with teachers as a pedagogical advisor for the past six years, observing teachers in their classrooms, both as formal supervisory observation or as informal observation for developmental purposes.

Creating my own materials for students has required some money, which I have covered myself. Government schools have no money to make copies of student worksheets. With a large class, I need to minimize the cost. I often give students' worksheets in groups instead of to every student. Depending on the size of my classes, of 20–70 students, I make 10 copies for 10 groups.

The first time the materials were used in my and my colleagues' classes, the common remarks were that the lessons engaged students more as they liked the classroom activities and the project work. However, the time allotted to some activities wasn't enough

1   https://www.globalschoolsprogram.org/

I'm a farmer, after the rainy season we have no other activity to get money. My husband isn't rich enough to give us everything we need. So I must produce charcoal to get money.

Discussion and writing

From your reading, discuss and write down the reasons why people exploit the forest.

● **Figure 1**: Sample from a textbook that I created, about protecting forests (Grade 12)

Pairwork: look at these animals. Here are their names in the box and write the animal's name below its picture.

Lion, elephant, hyena, phyton, Captain
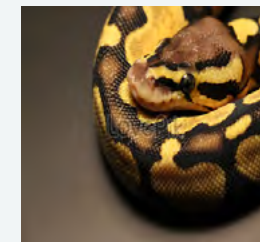
● **Figure 2**. Vocabulary activity using pairwork (Grade 9)

Discussion

Have you ever seen these animals?

Which one have you seen?

Where have you seen them?

How often do you them?

• **Figure 3:** Finding solutions to protect endangered animals, using groupwork (Grade 9)

Groupwork

Problems with animals

What actions contribute to the extinction of the animals above?

………
………
………

Solutions to protect animals

Which actions do you think can help to protect them?

………
………
………

• **Figure 4:** A grammar focus on the passive voice (Grade 9)

to complete the task. I therefore adjusted the time and included guidance in the teacher's guide to be flexible with the task completion time. Figures 1–4 are illustrations of some of the materials.

Seeing the success of the innovation, I pushed a bit further by sharing the materials with a local teachers' association. Many teachers found the content useful and started to teach similar lessons in their own classes. Some adapted the content to their own learners' context. The outcomes of this innovation were that students understood they have a responsibility to protect our environment and started a project to plant trees in different schools. They also challenged and informed their parents to stop deforestation for the betterment of the future generation.

In junior secondary schools, I have also incorporated a lesson on terrorism in my grade 9. The conflict has spread from northern to central regions (Mopti-Segou) and led to many refugees. This lesson was taught to urge them to take action for displaced people in their community. As a grammar focus, students could use the modal verb 'can' to express their ability to support displaced people from the northern regions of Mali and bring peace in their country.

In groups, they dealt with the following:

- How could you help people who have lost everything during the Sokolo attack?
- What can you do for your peers fleeing terrorist attacks as they have no access to education for years?
- What can you do for travelers who sleep by the roadside?
- How can you help Malian Force Army (FaMa) to fight against terrorism?

Answers provided by different groups included:

- I can give them clothes. / I can give them money to support.
- We can do exercises together. / I can give them school kits.
- I can give them mosquito nets.
- I can give information to FaMa about any suspected case of terrorism.

From the students' answers, I realized that the lesson was worthwhile and the students had developed a basis of socioemotional learning, which is to show empathy to other people. They were also confident to be change-makers in their communities starting at an early age (15–16 years). To learn more about this topic, see my article at IATEFL Global Issues SIG publication Creating Global Change (April 2020).

Another topic – gender equity – allowed my students to develop an understanding of the injustices that girls are subject to in the local community. In groups, the students learned how girls experience injustice in education. Of course, in Mali a chance is given to all the girls to access school. But the barrier to girls' schooling in most communities is the fact girls have much work to do at home, including washing up, fetching water, and cooking. Boys are not concerned with all these chores. In reality, parents expect to get similar school success from girls and boys. What an unbalanced situation! Most of the time, girls are not aware of this oppression. The gender equity lesson raised students' awareness of social injustice. They are more likely to make strong decisions based on social justice when they become parents or even policy-makers. For further reading, see FUTURITY IATEFL Global Issues SIG e-zine (Issue 3, May 2021).[2]

Recommendations

To foster learners' skills in sustainability in English classes at junior secondary school, the following recommendations are necessary:

- The Ministry of Education should create a (sub-)department of textbook writers focusing on the local context and sustainable development;
- The English department needs to rethink the content and update the English syllabus at junior secondary school;
- Non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Education should support and promote the establishment of local teachers' associations to collaborate on sustainability;
- School owners (private) should invest in training their teachers on how to incorporate sustainability in their classroom work; teachers need to train themselves and engage in advocacy for Education for Sustainable Development;
- Teachers should promote behavior change through extracurricular activities.

Conclusion

Teaching sustainability topics in English as an additional language remains challenging in Mali, as the national curriculum focuses less on these issues and teachers are not trained enough in this area. This paper has underlined the importance of English language in a multi-linguistic context. Although Mali has more than thirteen national languages and many foreign languages, English occupies a solid position in education.

This paper has also described the challenges related to textbooks at secondary school, which remains a big issue. In senior secondary schools, the education department does not provide textbooks for students, even though some sustainability topics are included in the curriculum in grade 12. But in junior secondary schools, the textbooks are old-fashioned and have not changed since 1980.

However, the engagement and involvement of local practitioners working closely in a teachers' association has led to a great impact, raising students' awareness of environmental and climate crises that our world needs to address. Integrating sustainability topics in the classroom has raised students' academic competence in terms of learning language, their teamworking competence, and their leadership skills. In brief, they have developed life skills.

2   https://gisig.iatefl.org/e-zine/

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New curriculum and ELT textbooks in The Gambia: The SEL dimension

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Abstract

As The Gambia moves forward with national curriculum change, the concepts of social-emotional learning, as reflected in the values of the national curriculum framework as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4.7, have set the stage for a culture of change within education in The Gambia. The new curriculum for English incorporates a competency-based approach. It also strives to ensure that all learners in Grades 1-9 experience classroom environments that instill societal values to develop their social and emotional skills while also creating a generation of resilient citizens who can cope with and solve environmental and sustainability challenges within their country. The new competency-based English language textbooks that are being written to advance these values through engaging and relevant content aim to further these goals and are a departure from the previous textbooks, which viewed English as a body of knowledge to be learned.

Curriculum reform in The Gambia

The Republic of The Gambia is the smallest country in mainland Africa, with a population of about 2 million. The heart of the country is the Gambia River, whose meandering east–west path gives the country its shape. At its widest point, the country measures less than 50 kilometers across. It is ranked amongst the poorest in the world (173 UN-HDI 2016) and is faced with many developmental challenges, including an unskilled young population and low literacy rates, especially for women.

The Gambia is also culturally and linguistically rich, with multiple ethnic groups, each preserving their own language.[1] Many Gambians are fluent in more than one of these national languages, and it is not uncommon for people of different ethnic groups to live and work side by side or inter-marry.

Despite this rich linguistic tapestry, English remains the official language and is the medium of instruction for formal education. The government is in the process of crafting a language policy to allow for the national languages to become the medium of instruction for the first two stages of education (Early Childhood Development, or Stage 1, and grades 1–3, or Stage 2) before transitioning to English for stages three, four, and five (grades 4–12), but this transition to national language instruction is still in development.

In the interim, the curriculum for English language instruction has experienced a paradigm shift, culminating in the creation of a competency-based curriculum and new syllabi for English, which are scheduled for piloting in 2023. This overhaul of the English-language curriculum is part of a larger revision of the national curriculum framework, one which has placed the tenets of social-emotional learning (SEL) and SDG 4.7 at its core. The framework explicitly references the Sustainable Development Goals, which have assumed a larger role in the development of curricula since

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1 The languages of The Gambia are Mandinka, Pulaar, Olof, Sarahule, Jolla, Seereer and Manjaku.

2017. The tenets of social-emotional learning, while not explicitly referenced as such, are apparent in the framework's emphasis on Lifelong Learning Skills (LLS), which lays the foundation for learning and working. These skills broadly support students' thinking, self-management, and social interaction, which are fundamental components of most models of SEL.

Education – and, in particular, the revision of the curriculum – is part of The Gambia's poverty reduction strategy (PRS II). Approaches to curriculum revision can vary according to strategic goals and policy priorities, and in the past, the focus was on 'increasing access, addressing equity and equality in education' (Curriculum Framework for Basic Education in The Gambia, 2023, p. 12). While efforts to achieve these strategic goals have yielded some success, such as an increase in enrolment at the Early Childhood Development (Stage 1), the current revision of the curriculum responds to a national priority of shifting the focus of education from merely passing examinations to building character, nurturing values, and raising literate, confident, and engaged citizens who can collaborate and think critically.

Additionally, the shift to a competency-based curriculum is a response to international trends, emphasizing an activity-based approach that involves inquiry, creativity, manipulation, collaboration, and social interaction as strategies for acquiring competencies that are knowledge-based. Furthermore, the growing impacts of globalization, climate change, and the challenges of a sustainable future have added extra urgency. The development of competencies is intended to provide youth with skills for building a sustainable and economically prosperous future.

SEL in the Gambian context

As a result of shifting to a competency-based curriculum, SEL is an important part of enabling learners to meet the larger goals of sustainability and economic success. Within the Gambian context, it is possible to describe the inclusion of SEL elements within the education system through Western models of SEL, including what is probably the best-known model of social-emotional learning, specifically the framework established by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The five pillars or domains of the framework – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making – further the development of learners' skills to collaborate creatively and effectively to develop the competencies needed to realize a sustainable and economically prosperous future.

In the CASEL 2020 framework, self-awareness refers to the ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence one's behavior in different situations; self-management is the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors effectively in different contexts as well as to achieve goals and aims; social awareness refers to the ability to understand the viewpoints of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures; relationship skills involve the ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with others and to navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups; responsible decision-making is the ability to make thoughtful and beneficial choices about one's personal behavior and social interactions in diverse situations.

The goals of this framework are to cultivate growth within these five domains in order to lay a foundation for better psychological and emotional adjustment as well as academic performance, which combine to create learners who can interact constructively in social situations, present fewer behavioral problems, experience less emotional upset, and achieve improved grades and test scores (Greenberg et al., 2003). Thus, learners who can manage their emotions, solve problems, and make more responsible decisions are better able to concentrate or express their feelings when they do not understand something. For example, when hearing or reading something she does not readily comprehend, a child who has developed self-management and self-awareness is more likely to show resilience, reflecting or trying to figure out the meaning

instead of acting out or simply moving on. Gambian learners need to develop these skills in order to attain the necessary competencies and resourcefulness to succeed in their educational environment.

Furthermore, young learners who have developed social awareness and empathy for their peers have better skills and emotional resources to work with their classmates. Early childhood is characterized by a curiosity in learning, alone or with others, about the world, both real and imaginary (Cantor et al., 2017). Thus, there is an inherent receptiveness to working with peers and learning about them. In these early years, children notice patterns of cause and effect, gain agency and a sense of self, and begin to figure out how the world works on many levels, including socially (Grazzani, 2018). Children are moving from a self-focused world to one in which they act with others to satisfy their curiosities and achieve their goals (Shtulman, 2007). In this respect, developing empathy and awareness of the feelings and needs of others facilitates learners' ability to satisfy and achieve their own goals.

While the CASEL framework is well-known throughout the Western world, it has not been explored widely in non-Western contexts, including countries in Africa. For example, as of 2012, only one meta-analysis of SEL included studies conducted outside North America (Sklad et al., 2012). Just over 21% of the studies examined in that meta-analysis were from educational settings outside of North America, but none were from sub-Saharan Africa or non-Western low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Much qualitative work on SEL in non-Western LMICs has been published, for example in *NISSEM Global Briefs* volume 3 (Smart & Sinclair, Eds., 2022) and other journals. Thus, while the CASEL framework has its merits, it is important to consider how SEL is reflected contextually through the Gambian lens within its new curriculum.

Empathy, respect for others and an awareness of their feelings are key values within the Gambian context: the curriculum highlights these and other competencies and values that aim to develop learners' social and emotional skills and awareness. Learners in The Gambia come from diverse societies, language

backgrounds, and cultures, and 'these diverse cultures conform to society's shared values and contribute to the society in general… It is important to promote the shared values and principles of good and productive citizenship so that students learn to behave in a socially appropriate manner both in school and after school, in the home or workplace' (Curriculum Framework for Basic Education in The Gambia, 2023, p. 18).

The following values are promoted throughout the curriculum, across all subjects and at all stages and grade levels:

- tolerance
- respect
- fair play and honesty
- compassion
- integrity
- responsibility
- love
- unity
- social cohesion

In order to cultivate these values within Gambian learners, the social and emotional dimensions of learning – as operationalized in the curriculum framework – have an important role, not only in underpinning the entire system of education, but also in the development of the new English textbooks.

Education about and for the environment

Since sustainability issues are also amongst the national priorities for the future, education about the environment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and safety are also an important part of the new curriculum. The Gambia's location in West Africa gives rise to two seasons, a dry season, from November to May, and a wet season, from June to October. During the wet season, the country experiences monsoons typical of the region, which can bring intense rains that cause significant flooding and erosion. Rising

sea levels and coastal erosion have contributed to environmental degradation, and in August 2021, the country experienced widespread flooding that displaced over 5,000 people and destroyed homes, crops, and vital infrastructure (United Nations, 2022). Although The Gambia contributes very little to emissions of greenhouse gases, it is on the frontline of climate change.

While no research on the effects of climate change on the youth of The Gambia has been conducted to date, it is possible to look to research in similarly positioned countries in the Global South. In 2021, Hickman et al. surveyed 10,000 young people living in one of 10 countries about their feelings regarding climate change, consisting of 1,000 participants from each of the following countries: Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, the UK, and the USA. The young people, who were between the ages of 16 and 25, reported feeling a variety of emotions, including anxiety, sadness, powerlessness, and anger, with 59% feeling extremely worried about environmental degradation and climate change, and 84% at least moderately worried. Furthermore, more than 45% of these young people reported that their negative feelings about the environment and climate change had an impact on their ability to function in their daily lives. Although the study by Hickman et al. (2021) covered only 10 target countries, the results revealed that 'Countries expressing more worry and a greater impact on functioning tended to be poorer, in the Global South, and more directly impacted by climate change' (p. e866).

Hickman et al. (2021) did not look at actual mental health outcomes, only the self-reported feelings of poor mental or emotional health as a result of climate change. However, a 2022 scoping review by Sharpe and Davison 'explored the relationship between climate change or climate-related disasters and mental disorders outcomes in LMICs' (Sharpe & Davison, 2022, p. 3). In this scoping review, Sharpe and Davison synthesized 23 studies conducted in LMICs, including India and the Philippines, which were both included in Hickman et al. (2021). Sharpe and Davison

(2022) determined that depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder were the most prevalent findings amongst children who lived through various disasters attributed to extreme and atypical weather events related to climate change. However, 'there was a limited amount of evidence supporting an association between these variables' (p. 13). Although young people in The Gambia were not included in this study, extreme weather events related to climate change are an established facet of their lives, so such research is directly relevant to their context.

Although Sharpe and Davison (2022) were clear that more research needs to be done to determine the nature of the relationship between experiencing a disaster caused by climate change and mental health amongst children in LMICs, and specifically whether there may be a causal relation, another scoping review has shed additional light on the research on climate change and its bearing on the mental health of youth. Ma et al. (2022) took a slightly different approach to this issue, synthesizing 92 studies from around the world that looked at risk factors and protective factors with respect to the mental state of youth experiencing disasters related to climate change. In other words, what coping strategies or mechanisms do young people employ to process the effects of climate change in their lives so that their mental health is not adversely impacted?

The scoping review by Ma et al. (2022) used the ecological system theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1992) to characterize the risk and protective factors. This latter theory presents four levels of classifications within a model of four concentric circles. In the core circle is the individual level, identifying an individual's unique characteristics, such as genetics, personality, and personal coping mechanisms. This core lies within the micro-system circle of the family and social network, which in turn is within the exo-system circle of community, which is itself housed within the macro-system of cultural identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). By organizing the studies according to level in which the risk or protective factors resided, Ma et al. (2022) determined that most of

the studies addressed the individual level and micro-system levels, thus concluding that 'young people who have a higher emotion regulation capacity and overall coping skills tended to have better adjustment following exposure to a climate change event' (p. 11).

Thus, the inclusion of education about the environment within all subjects in the Gambian education system serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it is one avenue to raise awareness in the next generation about these issues; in this, The Gambia is in accord with UNESCO's urging that all countries include environmental education as a core curriculum component by 2025. Beyond this, however, the inclusion of SEL within a broad context of environmental education facilitates the development of learners' ability to cope with the inevitable effects of climate change within their country.

In other words, there is a two-pronged approach: Gambian youth need the facts and information to raise their environmental awareness because this knowledge is what spurs a call to action and enables them to understand how the environment is harmed or helped by human action. On the other hand, this knowledge can be frightening and cause anxiety. Young people understand their environment is suffering, which has repercussions on their basic daily lives while they are not yet in positions of agency within society.

Framing this discussion in terms of societal connectedness, it is also possible to look to the research on resiliency which has also examined the impact of climate change and environmental degradation from a societal perspective. Carmen et al. (2021) conducted a meta-synthesis of the research on social resiliency, designating three types of resiliency, reactive, responsive, and proactive (p. 1374). Reactive resilience refers to the acute phase of the aftermath of an environmental disaster, while responsive resilience refers to learning from the events by enacting stronger systems to reduce negative outcomes of future occurrences (Carmen et. al, 2021). The third type, proactive resilience, addresses the 'ongoing process of foresight, experimentation, reflection

and learning, requiring systemic perspectives and multi-scalar approaches involving norms, identities and values' (Carmen et al., 2021, p. 1375). In other words, changing the public's way of thinking about or attitude toward the effects of climate change and environmental disasters.

Therefore, it is essential to equip youth with the tools to cope with that burden. By turning to SEL to promote self-management, self- and social-awareness, empathy, and responsible decision making to achieve harmonious societies, perhaps young people will be better equipped to process the stress and emotions caused by climate change. Ideally, environmental education includes cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral dimensions. Thus incorporation of SEL and environmental education across the curriculum should work hand-in-hand to develop responsible and responsive citizens for The Gambia. At the broader level, the curriculum development stems from responsive resilience, learning from the events the country has experienced, while also acknowledging the need for proactive resilience, working to change the way the generation of Gambians currently in school views the effects of climate change and the need to tackle them through creative solutions based on understanding and experience.

Current textbooks in The Gambia

As The Gambia has a single national textbook per subject approved for use in government schools, the textbook is the main teaching and learning resource for all grades. Furthermore, it is the main way in which the curriculum is operationalized in the classroom, although the new competency-based syllabi for English across the grades include learning situations that give teachers guidance on how to create situations to facilitate development of the competencies without the textbooks.

The textbooks currently in use in grades 1 through 6 were written and rolled out to schools in the early 2000s while those for grades 7–9 followed in the early 2010s. The textbooks

for grades 1–6 were written by a panel of Gambian educators with the technical assistance of international consultants and the manuscripts were subsequently produced by Macmillan Education. The production values, including the design and illustrations, are of high quality, commensurate with those produced by Macmillan Education for other markets. However, as the course was tailored to the Gambian context and written by Gambian authors for the government schools, the Department of State for Education of The Gambia holds the copyright in the text, while Macmillan Education retains the copyright in the design and illustrations. The textbooks for grades 7–9 were created under comparable arrangements with Pearson Education, and the copyrights for text and design / illustrations are similarly assigned to the Gambian authorities and Pearson Education, respectively.

With respect to the textbook package, the components of both the Macmillan Education and Pearson Education courses consist of a Pupil's Book and a Teacher's Book. No workbooks, ancillary materials, posters, or electronic resources are provided as part of the resource package.

The use of textbooks in The Gambia is similar to many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa: class sets of the Pupil's Books are provided for each class and learners do not typically take the textbooks home. However, the specific realities and regulations for each school may vary in that some schools may have sufficient copies for each learner to use in class while learners in other schools may need to share. Additionally, some schools permit learners to sign out textbooks to take home. These procedures largely depend on the availability of resources, personnel available to monitor materials and their use, and the policies of those in charge of the schools.

Because textbooks remain in the school and are used repeatedly, learners are not permitted to write in them. This presents challenges, especially at the lower grades when learners are just learning to write. All learners have a copybook, which they must provide for themselves. Learners write answers to questions in these copybooks for teachers to check during class, but they also spend time copying exercises from the Pupil's Books to complete in class or at home. This replication of the Pupil's Book results in lost class time and may be frustrating, especially for younger learners who have yet to develop fluent handwriting skills. Furthermore, the teacher must monitor the copying, and – depending on the size of the class – it is possible that some children leave the classroom without completing the copying or understanding what they have copied.

New curriculum leading to new textbooks

The advent of a new curriculum necessitated revising the English textbooks. New textbooks were planned and written in 2022–23 by a team of Gambian educators from the Curriculum Research Evaluation and Development Directorate as well as practicing teachers, teacher trainers, and university lecturers, again with international consulting assistance. Originally, the textbook package was to consist of only a Pupil's Book and Teacher's Book for each grade, but the opportunity arose to develop workbooks for Grades 1–3, in the hope that funding might become available to ensure learners in these critical early years have the opportunity to develop a firm foundation not only in handwriting skills but also in the basic content and language needed to provide a firm footing for their academic futures.
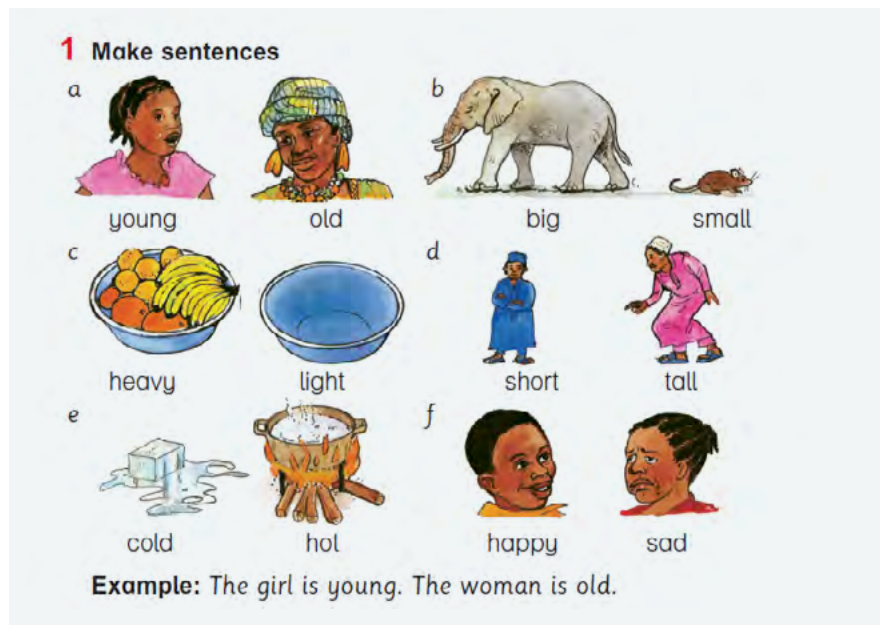
Although the existing textbooks were culturally relevant, the new English textbooks needed to focus more firmly on enabling learners to develop competencies and skills instead of focusing on memorizing information about English, whether it be English grammar rules or definitions of vocabulary. Additionally, the national curriculum framework's focus on the concepts of SEL, environment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and safety called for revision of the content so that these values and themes could be included more robustly or updated in the existing material.

Because of these changes in approach to learning and the national curriculum framework, serious overhauls of the early grade textbooks were required, although for the upper grades, elements of the existing textbooks could be retained and presented in different ways with activities to develop critical thinking, creativity, and social-emotional and academic competencies.

Examples of the materials

To illustrate the transition to a competency-based textbook that focuses on SEL, the environment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and safety, examples from the previous textbooks will be compared to the material intended for the new textbooks. Because the new textbooks currently exist only in manuscript form, the following examples of the new textbooks use manuscript conventions (which will be explained).

● **Figure 1.** *English for The Gambia* Pupil's Book, Grade 3 (current textbook)
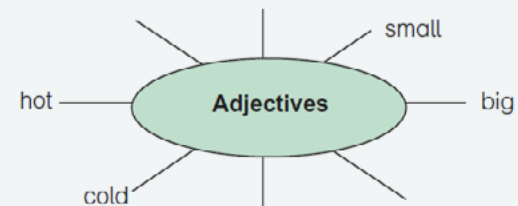
● **Figure 2.** *English for The Gambia* Pupil's Book, Grade 3 (current textbook)

In the example in Figure 1, from the current textbook, the vocabulary for adjectives is presented under the heading of 'Make sentences'. Learners look at the small pictures and make controlled sentences about them to demonstrate understanding of the meaning of the adjectives with respect to the people, animals, or things they describe. As the heading indicates, the goal is to make sentences, which is a grammatical characterization of language, and the controlled practice of the language focuses on factual or objective characterizations. For example, *The elephant is big. The mouse is small.*

Once the adjectives have been presented, learners read a folktale that incorporates many of the adjectives. After the comprehension and grammar practice, the learners return to consolidate their understanding of adjectives using a graphic organizer, as shown in Figure 2. They then write sentences, focusing on the meaning of adjectives that are opposites to guide the content of the sentences.

Reading/Writing

[Design: Place the following in a decorative/special style to be used consistently with the topic of each Reading/Writing lesson in each unit]

Value: Empathy

A. Listen, point and say.

[Design: Place images in a row with corresponding words underneath]

[a/w a happy emoji face]

happy

[a/w a sad emoji face]

sad

[a/w an angry emoji face]

angry

[a/w a tired emoji face]

tired

[a/w a worried emoji face]

worried

[Design: under all the words: happy, sad, angry, tired, worried, place a bracket and under that the word feelings.]

feelings

● **Figure 3**. Manuscript of new *English for The Gambia* Pupil's Book, Grade 3

Figures 3–5 are taken from the manuscripts for the new textbook for Grade 3. The pink text in brackets represents instructions to the designer and illustrators (a/w = artwork). The text for users of the book is not in brackets. Thus, for this example, there are five key adjectives: *happy, sad, angry, tired, worried*, which are also illustrated through pictures of facial expressions. The illustrator and the Gambian education professionals will work together to ensure the facial expressions capture those that are culturally appropriate to convey these feelings.

Notice that the adjectives in Figure 3 are presented within the context of values, specifically empathy: the value of empathy is stated at the top of the page. From the outset, there is no

B. Look, listen, and read.

[a/w a boy holding a football, crying because it's raining and he can't play. A friend is standing next to him with his arm on his shoulder comforting him]

How are you feeling? How are your friends feeling?
Sometimes we feel happy. I feel happy when I eat.
Sometimes we feel sad. My friend feels sad when he cannot play football.
Sometimes we feel angry. I feel angry when I cannot play.
Sometimes we feel tired. My sister feels tired when it is morning.
Sometimes we feel worried. I feel worried when there is too much rain.

● **Figure 4.** Manuscript of new *English for The Gambia* Pupil's Book, Grade 3

grammatical goal of making sentences. The learners are introduced to these vocabulary words as part of the wider concept of *feelings*.

The framing of this content as feelings within the value of empathy sets learners on the path to thinking about what these words mean and how they are used, not only how they can be used to make sentences to fulfill the instructions. While the learners may not have to learn the word *empathy*, its inclusion on the page provides exposure to it as the concepts are explored.

The activity presented in Figure 4 is a short reading passage accompanied by an illustration. The text is simple and intentionally repetitive to help develop automaticity in reading, but the content is more nuanced, demonstrating situations in which others may feel a certain way and also calling upon the learners to reflect on their own feelings and those of others. The text explores when and why people may feel the way they do. The illustration also attempts to capture an example of empathy in which one friend comforts another. The focus on environmental awareness is also quietly included through the final line of the passage, *I feel worried when there is too much rain.* By including this statement, learners who may feel worried receive acknowledgement that their feelings are valid.

This content also appears in the workbook for the new Grade 3 textbook package. In the workbook, shown in Figure 5, learners consolidate the meaning of the adjectives by reading and

Value: Empathy

A. Look, read and write.

[Place the following in a word bank box]

happy   sad   angry   tired   worried

[Place the images in a row with a blank line under each image for pupils to write on]

[a/w a happy emoji face]

[a/w a sad emoji face]

[a/w an angry emoji face]

[a/w a tired emoji face]

[a/w a worried emoji face]

[Design: under all the images and write-on lines place_bracket and the word "feelings"]:

feelings

B. How are you feeling? How is your friend feeling? Think and draw.

I am feeling _____.   My friend is feeling _____.

● **Figure 5.** Manuscript of new *English for The Gambia* Pupil's Book, Grade 3

matching them with their emojis. Finally, they express their own feelings of the moment as well as their perception of a friend's current feeling. They draw either an emoji or a picture that represents their own and their friend's feeling, then write the appropriate feeling word on the line.

For some learners in The Gambia, being asked how they feel is not a typical question in an English classroom since the focus is often on the understanding of language in and of itself, as illustrated by the older textbook's emphasis on factual or objective situations in which an adjective is used. Learners may be asked to describe how someone in an illustration feels or provide an expected answer to a question such as 'How do you feel when you hurt yourself?' By asking learners to express their feelings in general, without strongly signposting an expected feeling, they must reflect on those feelings and communicate them. Similarly, to express how their friend is feeling, they must observe or ask, which furthers social awareness as well as communication. In this respect, the inclusion of values serves to provide a context in which meaningful communication can take place. This serves to develop learners' competencies while advancing the larger goals of developing their citizenship and morals.

Figure 6 is a full page from the new Grade 2 Pupil's Book. This page introduces the concept of 'reduce, reuse, and recycle'. It is also a skills activity that familiarizes learners with a process for doing something: in this case, using discarded plastic bags to crochet colorful and durable new bags. The content also includes reference to internationally known Gambian environmental activist Isatou Ceesay, who is the subject of the 2015 children's picture book *One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia*.

While the process has been simplified in terms of vocabulary and steps, so that learners can demonstrate understanding of the process, the core elements are familiar and accessible to learners. More importantly, learners encounter a Gambian woman who is making real change within the country and representing The Gambia on an international stage. Inclusion of role models who have taken up the call of environmental stewardship and activism is

Skills

A. Say and point.

[Design: Place the sentence along one row with the pictures above their corresponding words]

[a/w a planet earth with a smiley face] [a/w a drop of water with a smiley face] [a/w a bag with a smiley face] [a/w a recycle bin with plastic bottles inside]

Happy Planet = Reduce Reuse Recycle

B. Listen, say and do.

Reuse

[Design: Please place the following 6 image in three rows and format like the stories at the beginning of each unit. Palce the words at the bottom of each picture frame]

1. [a/w Isatou Ceesay (please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r354rs7aYzI) is picking up a dirty old plastic bag from a pile of rubbish outside]

Isatou Ceesay finds plastic bags.

2. [a/w Isatou Ceesay is washing the dirty plastic bag that she picked up in the first picture]

She washes them.

3. [a/w The plastic bag is hanging on a line to dry with other plastic bags]

She dries them.

4. [a/w A pair of scissors is cutting the bag]

She cuts them.

5. [a/w Isatou Ceesay is crocheting a new purse out of the plastic]

She makes new bags.

6. [a/w the area where Isatou Ceesay was picking up the plastic bag that was previously full of rubbish is now rubbish-free]

Happy planet!

● **Figure 6**. Manuscript of new *English for The Gambia* Pupil's Book, Grade 2

one way to educate as well as motivate young people to engage with the values of the national curriculum framework.

Conclusion

The next stage in the process will be to pilot and produce the new curriculum and textbooks. While these have been carefully aligned to maximize development of learners' English language competencies as well as further the values and wider goals of the national curriculum framework, challenges remain. Most teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders are new to the competency-based approach, and the real work of producing the textbooks is yet to begin. However, the foundation of the national curriculum framework, including its values and its focus on the environment, is strong and is expected to guide the process of changing the culture of education in The Gambia.

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14

Stories: Connect to language, self, others, and the environment

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Abstract

While countries have adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and drafted national curriculum policies that embrace SDG target 4.7 and the criticality of the social and emotional dimension of learning, textbook writers have the task of actualizing content and activities within the narrow constraints of learning and teaching materials in order to have a real impact on the development of social and emotional competencies in learners. This paper suggests a framework for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for Sustainable Development (SD) based on relationships to self, others, and the environment. It then outlines how stories can be used in English language teaching textbook development as a vehicle for connecting learners to language, self, others, and the environment, thereby increasing SEL for SD.

1   Introduction

Since Japan introduced the idea of education for sustainable development (ESD) – which entails social-emotional and behavioral as well as cognitive dimensions (UNESCO, 2017) – to the international community in 2002 (Sumida, 2019), governments, policy makers, researchers, and educational institutions have developed frameworks for ESD that have led to the development of carefully articulated SEL programs and initiatives. As a part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015, the fourth goal, and specifically target 4.7, advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education, recognizing the need to promote sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, peace, nonviolence, and global citizenship. Nations seek to move towards achieving this goal by means of national education policies, curricula, and teacher education, addressing thematic issues and the promotion of social and emotional learning (SEL), which underpins positive responses to the challenges of sustainability.

This paper develops a framework for Social Emotional Learning for Sustainable Development (SEL for SD) based on relationships to self, others, and the environment. Through this framework, it is possible to correlate the awareness of relationships and responsible decision-making. The paper then suggests that one way in which English language textbooks can promote greater relationship awareness is through stories that connect learners to language, self, others, and the environment, thereby increasing SEL for SD.

2   A framework for Social Emotional Learning for Sustainable Development (SEL for SD)

Perhaps the best-known framework for SEL is that developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which coined the term social and emotional learning in 1994 to provide a framework for student support programs (CASEL, n.d.). CASEL defines SEL as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, n.d.).

The framework developed by CASEL divides social emotional learning into five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-

making. This framework has served as the basis for program development and evidence-based research implemented in programs extensively in the United States. Much research and program development has been built on the foundation laid by CASEL.

Globally, the implementation of SEL in policy, educational goals, and programs varies according to social and cultural contexts. Whereas CASEL views SEL within the above five competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making), an alternative Japanese framework for SEL is based on 22 values that fall into four relationship categories: self, others, society, and life/nature/sublime (Sumida, 2019).

SEL for SD draws on such competency-based as well as values-based models to form a framework that merges the two approaches in order to present SEL within the context of three key relationships – relationship to self, relationships to others (individuals and communities), and relationship to the environment – and to situate responsible decision-making at the center. It assumes that healthy relationships require a high degree of awareness, and that with a high degree of awareness of these key relationships, responsible decisions are more likely to be made (Figure 1).

2.1 Relationship to self / Self-awareness

One's relationship to self begins with self-awareness, which includes: the ability to label one's feelings and relate them to thoughts and behavior; the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and weaknesses within a growth mindset; the awareness that actions have positive and negative consequences; the ability to think positively, learn from mistakes, have realistic expectations, and celebrate achievements; and the ability to examine prejudices and biases. Self-awareness is crucial to self-management, which is the ability to regulate emotions; manage stress; adjust behavior according to situational appropriateness; set and achieve realistic

● **Figure 1.** Social emotional learning for sustainable development

goals; maintain a growth mindset; exhibit resilience; and maintain a sense of responsibility for self. With greater self-awareness comes improved self-management, which results in better decision-making that has a benefit for oneself.

2.2 Relationship to others / Social awareness

Relationship to others begins with social awareness, which includes being aware of other individuals, their emotions, situations, perspectives, and circumstances. On a larger scale, social awareness includes a recognition of social networks and one's place within diverse local and global communities, including the societal elements of the goal of sustainable development. Greater social awareness is the first step to improved social skills. Social skills enable individuals to listen actively, communicate clearly, navigate social situations, cooperate with others to achieve a common goal, recognize the needs of others, negotiate, offer support, exhibit empathy, lead and follow when appropriate, and establish and maintain positive relationships with diverse individuals and communities. Improved social skills

result in better decision-making that affects other individuals and both local and global communities.

2.3 Relationship to the environment / Environmental awareness

One's relationship to the environment begins with environmental awareness. Environmental awareness includes recognition and appreciation of the natural world, an understanding of the interconnection of all living entities and one's personal dependence on a healthy regenerative environment, and an understanding of the impact that individual and societal choices have on the environment. Environmental awareness leads to environmental stewardship evidenced by better decisions being made to protect the environment for current and future generations.

2.4 Responsible decision-making

Developing self-, social, and environmental awareness, values and skills can equip individuals with essential SEL competencies that affect the decisions they make. Individuals can assess situations and consequences, anticipate results, evaluate impact on a micro and macro level, and recognize their ability to make responsible decisions that positively affect themselves, other individuals, communities, their society and the environment.

3 The case for including SEL in academics

As the significance of SEL in achieving the SDGs has become more widely recognized, more governments have responded by incorporating SEL into national policy. In 2017, the Council of Distinguished Scientists endorsed *The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development* (Jones, 2017), which draws on multidisciplinary research showing that the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning improves students' learning

outcomes. Extensive neurobiological research has shown that cognitive processes are inseparable from social and emotional processes (Immordino-Yang, 2016); one simply cannot happen without the other. Supporting positive social and emotional learning is not at the cost of developing cognitive skills and academic knowledge. When done well, the two go hand in hand. 'The introduction of social and emotional learning provides a double dividend to learners and society by improving academic achievements and nurturing empathetic and compassionate individuals dedicated to building a kinder world' (Singh & Duraiappah, 2021). Knowing this, policy makers, educators, and curriculum developers can confidently prioritize the social and emotional dimensions of learning as essential to achieving academic excellence.

4 Incorporating stories into curricula to promote SEL for SD

Curricula can have a powerful effect on society by legitimizing and normalizing content topics, attitudes, values, and behaviors. Teachers in many contexts rely heavily on course materials, which sometimes are the only books their students will ever read. Course materials play a critical role in transmitting knowledge and skills that equip students with the competencies to face the challenges of uncertain futures. These materials can act as either *barriers* or *carriers* of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to personal, societal, and environmental futures (Smart et. al., 2020). This makes textbooks critical tools in the English language classroom, not only for teaching the English language but also for wider educational goals. The substance of language studies relates to people and their lives, which makes it an effective *carrier* for supporting the development of social emotional competencies and their application in managing self, others, and the environment.

Stories can simultaneously act as *carriers* of both academic content (in this case, English vocabulary and grammar) and SEL

content. Through stories, learners can explore and develop deeper relationships to themselves, other individuals, local and global communities, and the natural world around them. Increased self-awareness, social awareness, and environmental awareness can lead to greater self-management, improved social skills, and better environmental stewardship.

4.1 The psychological impact of stories

Story-making and the writing of stories are distinctly human characteristics. They can play a vital role in how we process information and in much of our thinking about past, present, and future. They can help us explain everything from a simple daily task to the meaning of life. Stories can give our lives purpose, bind us socially, and give our brains a structure to process information, both substantively and emotionally. Furthermore, stories are a key to connection. They can help us to better understand ourselves and our connection to other individuals, local and global communities, and the natural world around us.

The purpose of language learning is to connect to others. As stories are deeply intertwined with language, language learning is the natural conduit for communication that facilitates the social and emotional learning in relation to self, society, and the environment. When language is taught as disconnected, grammatically-repetitive sentences with a focus entirely on form, we miss the opportunity to exploit the natural, story-based construct of language that is embedded with meaning and social connectivity, and which has the potential to impact what has been termed 'learning to become' (Smart et al., 2020).

4.2 The physiological impact of stories

Besides their psychological importance, stories also have physiological importance. The stories we hear and read can cause chemicals such as dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin, and serotonin to be released. These tap into our emotions, connecting neuropathways that deepen learning. In the classroom, when we rely heavily on cognitive processes through auditory and visual inputs that ignore emotions, we forgo the opportunity to stimulate a larger portion of learners' brains, thereby reducing the possibilities of their learning. A good story – whether prose, comic strip, or data-driven – that elicits an emotional response has the potential to achieve almost global activation of the brain.

5 Stories, a key to connection

Stories are a key to connection. They are the vehicle that connects one to language, self, others, and the environment, which in turn improves language acquisition, self-awareness, social awareness, and environmental awareness, leading to greater self-management, social skills, and environmental stewardship, all of which can lead to better decision-making towards a sustainable future.

5.1 Stories connect to language

Stories connect us to language; they support the internalization of lexical sets and grammatical structures while simultaneously acting as *carriers* of that which promotes social and emotional learning. When this is done well, students don't even realize they're learning. The story acts as a type of Trojan horse within which lies vocabulary and grammar along with life lessons in empathy, self-awareness, diversity, endurance, friendships, respect, and so much more.

Several research studies show that information is better retained when presented in the form of a story (Bower & Clark, 1969; George & Schaer, 1986; Oaks, 1995). Imagine a vocabulary list encountered in a grade 2 classroom consisting (in part) of the following: *leg, foot, toe, arm, hand, finger*. It is likely that images of each word came to students' minds as the words were being read. Adding some grammar around the new vocabulary we have the following: *The*

monkey has two legs, two feet, and ten toes. It is likely that this sentence elicits a more vivid image than the words listed in isolation. Adding a story further strengthens the image in our minds and perhaps elicits an emotional response:

Mia saw a pot. She looked inside. Soup! Is it hot? Mia put one finger in the soup. Hot! She put two fingers in the soup. Hot! She put one toe in the soup.

Not only are students more likely to internalize the vocabulary and grammar when it is presented in the context of a story, but the story also provides a natural platform for creative responses and meaningful discussions using the language in an authentic way. Students can, for example, react creatively by predicting what Mia does next. Meaningful discussions could contribute to greater environmental, social, and self-awareness. For example, the textbook could guide students to think about a time they were curious, how they behaved, and what happened. Teachers could talk about curiosity, discovery, empathy, and personal safety.

Another key factor in language acquisition is repetition. It's not enough to hear a word once, twice, or three times; a word must be encountered over and over again in a variety of contexts (not simply repeated in isolation) for it to be internalized (Mason et al., 2009). Each time a word is encountered in a new context, its meaning expands and solidifies in the mind of the learner. As discussions unfold, there is ample opportunity for key vocabulary and grammar to be repeated in contextualized ways that provide meaningful repetition and lead to lasting language acquisition.

5.2 Stories connect to self

In a paper commissioned by UNESCO as background to drafting the Futures of Education (UNESCO, 2021), authors Smart et al. define strong materials as those that *reflect a child's reality* and engage them emotionally with an emphasis on *learning to become* rather than *learning to know*. 'By 'learning to become', students can acquire self-directing and interpersonal skills, inclusive identities and a sense of
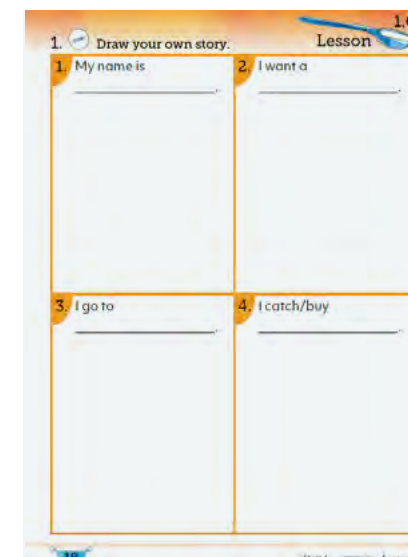
Figure 2. *Story Soup*, grade 2, Workbook pp. 13 & 18 (Engaged Learning Press)

local, national and global citizenship, even in the face of uncertainty' (Smart et al., 2020). Using personally relevant stories as a vehicle of language instruction engages students cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and turns language learning into a dynamic process in which students learn to become.

Guiding students to tell their own stories or create stories around a given theme or framework gives them a voice. This contributes to the development of self-awareness as they articulate their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and experiences. When allowed to share these personal stories with peers in a classroom setting, a cohesive classroom community emerges, which promotes inclusion.

Textbooks can support students to create and tell their own stories. For younger learners at lower levels, open-ended gap-fill activities can guide students through their own story-telling. This could be as simple as students choosing minor details such as the name of a character or something more complex such as the setting, a character's motive, and the outcome. These open-ended activities

Writing preparation

1 **Read the description. Do you think the writer likes the new teacher?**

2 **Answer the questions.** ✍
   1 What subject does Mr Williams teach?
   2 Is there more information about what he looks like or what he's like as a person?
   3 What musical instrument does he play?
   4 Is he better at playing this instrument or singing?

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

Opis

Gdy chcesz opisać jakąś osobę, zastanów się nad tym:
- jak wygląda,
- jaką ma osobowość,
- co lubi robić.

Postaraj się także uwzględnić jakąś ciekawą informację na temat tej osoby.

3 **Read the *Improve Your Writing* tip. What is the most interesting fact in the text?**

Writing project

4 **Write a description of a classmate. Use the model text, the *Improve Your Writing* tip and the steps below to help you.** ✍
   - **Choose** a classmate to describe: your partner, for example.
   - **Make notes** about everything you know about them. Ask them questions to find out more!
   - **Write** your description. Remember to include what they look like, what they're like, what they do and one interesting fact about them, but don't include their name.

5 **Swap your text with your partner. Check each other's spelling and grammar.**

6 **The teacher will read out the descriptions to the class – can you guess who each text describes?**

ONLINE LINK ☝

Do some online research. Find out how to say 'Nice to meet you' in British Sign Language (BSL).

physical description / personality

The new teacher

Our new English teacher is called Mr Williams.

He's tall and he's got short, dark-brown hair and blue eyes. He's got a beard and a nice smile.

He's very friendly.

He's a good teacher and he usually gives us interesting homework. He speaks English, Spanish and Polish, and he knows British Sign Language! He's got a motorbike.

He also loves music and in his free time he plays the guitar. He sometimes joins in concerts at school – he plays really well, but I don't think he's a good singer!

activity

● **Figure 3**. *Link VI*, Student's Book, p. 16 (Oxford University Press)

are more effective after sufficient vocabulary and grammar have been introduced and models have been provided. For example, after introducing vocabulary and grammar for homes, a model story set in a home is presented, followed by a gap-fill that guides students to

write their own story set in a home of their choosing. In Figure 2, we can see a model story followed by a gap-fill of a simplified version that is accessible to the target age and grade. Similarly, Figure 3 shows a descriptive text example followed by an assignment guiding students through writing a descriptive text. These examples highlight the process of practice and modeling followed by creative, story-based application.

For older learners at higher levels, scaffolding and writing prompts can guide them through personal storytelling. Again, after sufficient vocabulary and grammar have been introduced and practiced, and after model text examples have been provided, students can produce their own personal stories. For example, after students are introduced to the vocabulary and grammar for personal descriptions and a model text in which a young person describes how they imagine themselves in ten years' time, students can then write their own future-self description.

Besides connecting to self through the telling of their own stories, learners can also connect to self through reading stories about other individuals, inspirational or struggling, and listening to their classmates' stories. By learning that other individuals have similar or different experiences and backgrounds they may feel less alone. And learning how other individuals have coped with difficult situations may give them hope in dealing with their own difficult situations.

5.3 Stories connect to other individuals, local and global communities

Social connection is not a luxury, it's an absolute necessity (Liberman, 2013). The mere existence of social pain tells us something about its importance. Pain doesn't exist randomly. It guides us away from that which is harmful. Like physical pain, social pain turns us away from harm; it guides us away from a potentially harmful life of solitude and turns our thinking and behavior towards a social network where we find the connection

and protection we need in order to survive. Social pain can also cause individuals to turn away from society, but the existence of social pain highlights the importance of social connection to humans as a species.

Stories that are shared between individuals of small and large groups of people, and even global communities, play a critical role in maintaining these social networks. Their shared stories connect group members to each other. Religious stories bind people of the same religion. When someone from a religious community stops believing in those shared stories, bonds are weakened, often to the point of expulsion. Family stories strengthen familial bonds. This is why they are told repeatedly at family gatherings. Nations canonize their history and tell it in a way that is intended to instill pride and loyalty in their citizens. Shared stories connect friends, families, classrooms, schools, communities, nations, and the world.

When shared stories are told in the classroom, and better yet, collectively created and told, social bonds are strengthened and a closer-knit community can evolve. Language textbooks can contribute to classroom cohesion by supporting students to tell their own stories, real or imaginary, and to learn each other's stories. Textbooks can do this by allowing more space for open-ended, creative responses to linguistic input. The telling of these personal stories in a classroom setting can contribute a great deal to developing a close-knit classroom community where the affective filter may be lowered and students are more willing to take risks in a new language.

When stories of a social group of which the learners are not a part are told, world views can expand and our empathy increase. With new stories, new connections can develop. By fostering emotional connections through stories, we can promote greater care and concern for individuals near and far.

Language textbooks can include stories of other individuals, small groups, societies, cultures, and the global community by incorporating biography, memoir, fiction, historical fiction, non-

● **Figure 4.** *Beehive*, Student Book 5, pp. 56–57 (Oxford University Press)

fiction, and folk tales, all of which can increase learners' social awareness and contribute to improved social skills. Material can be taken from existing literature and interpreted in ways that help the learning of language skills as well as social-emotional and societal dimensions. For new materials, the writers need training to avoid dull, moralizing texts that fail to engage the emotions of the students. Pro-social behavior can be reinforced through stories that teach empathy, diverse perspectives, conflict resolution, effective communication, negotiation, finding solutions, diversity, teamwork, collaboration, communication, cooperation, service, friendship, responsibility, and personal growth. When individuals feel a strong connection to a group, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the group.

Figure 5. *Guess What!*, Grade 3, p. 23 (Cambridge University Press)

5.4. Stories connect to the environment

We care about what we are connected to. Environmental identity theory (Piskoti, 2015) proposes that people develop a sense of attachment and identification with the natural environment as they interact with it. This attachment and identification with the natural environment influences behaviors and attitudes. Research in environmental psychology has supported the idea of environmental identity, showing that people who have a strong sense of identity with the environment and consciously value it are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors and support environmental policies (Piskoti, 2015). Identity *with* and a sense of belonging *to* the natural world promote environmental sustainability and behavior change.

In textbooks, stories can be used to explore the complex relationships between humans and the environment and support learners to gain a deeper understanding of their place within it. By engaging with environmental stories, both fiction and non-fiction (Figure 4), students can become not only proficient language learners but also responsible and informed global citizens who care about the health and well-being of our planet.
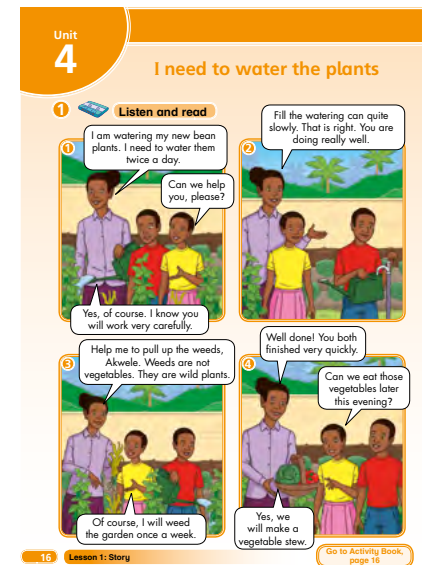
Figure 6. Republic of Ghana, *English for Primary Schools*, Pupil's Book 6, p. 16 (York Series)

Additionally, textbooks can include projects that encourage students to interact physically with their local environment (Figure 6) and return to the classroom to tell their stories of environmental engagement. These interactions can develop within learners a sense of connection to their natural environment and contribute to pro-environmental behaviors. An activity such as that in Figure 5 helps connect students to the environment and could be made more relevant and impactful for students by requiring them to observe a habitat near their home or school and focusing their mind map on what they've observed.

6 Challenges and recommendations

Several challenges inhibit the inclusion and use of stories in language learning textbooks and classrooms. This section will look at two such challenges: (1) content restrictions and space limitations within textbooks, and (2) pedagogical practices that view knowledge as static.

6.1 Textbooks

Many factors guide the development of English language teaching materials: approach, methodology, scope and sequence, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels, local context, L1 literacy levels, national standards, and exam requirements. Space within textbooks is limited and narratives compete with direct vocabulary instruction, explicit grammar practice, and the development of specific skills. Textbook writers not only need to be mindful of these restrictions, but also find ways to make content engaging and relevant to the learner within the local context, reflecting the student's unique world view, and to connect them to the larger world.

While a coursebook moves sequentially through vocabulary and grammar, curricular space must also be given for a degree of flexibility to deviate from these specifications to personalize the learning to students and support their 'learning to become'. Embedding more student agency into instructional materials, by allowing them to tell their own stories, goes a long way to support their social and emotional development and their learning to become.

6.2 Pedagogy

Pedagogies that view language as a set of rules to be learned, and knowledge as static information to be memorized, inhibit the use of stories as a vehicle of language instruction and tool for SEL. When using stories as the primary vehicle of instruction, teachers need to be comfortable with a relatively high degree of uncertainty. The interpretation and impact of a story fluctuates, depending on the learner, their past experiences and current state of mind. Within a dynamic, social classroom environment, where the interpretations, opinions, and points of view of each learner are allowed to bounce off those of the other learners, the entire process is much harder for the teacher to control and measure but these are the very conditions that allow not only for greater language acquisition but for increased SEL too.

Pedagogies that value SEL and recognize its contribution to cognitive functioning and academic success as well as the development of critical life skills that extend beyond the classroom leave room for uncertainty in the classroom and the dynamic nature of knowledge, learning, and self-discovery. For meaningful SEL to take place in language pedagogies, a certain degree of curricular flexibility must be granted and options offered. If teachers are only able to use prescribed vocabulary and stay within specific prescribed grammar constructs, it is difficult for them to include more meaningful communicative activities with students that will have an impact on character building and nation building for a sustainable future.

7 Conclusion

The need for connection and the power of connection in language learning specifically, and in education in general, cannot be underestimated and the role of stories in fostering such connection is clear. Textbook writers can support countries to achieve SDG target 4.7 by finding or creating relevant, story-based content that connects learners to self, to others, and to the environment.

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15

The power of biographies: Revolutionizing ideas through inspirational lives

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Abstract

Pratham Books, a publisher based out of India, creates engaging picture books in multiple languages and formats to help children discover the joy of reading. This paper explores how, by publishing biographies of contemporary women, transgender people and men from all walks of life, the publisher has been able to communicate to children the incredible power and resilience of lives that can inspire and present them with role models who have the ability to potentially influence their ideas and beliefs.

Based on a belief that books are agents of change and that stories open doors to new worlds and realities, the focus has been on telling stories of people on the margins and people from other genders; stories that are real and inspiring, yet talk about struggles and experiences that are not highlighted. Until recently, most biographies published in India were based on popular names in the public sphere – freedom fighters, leaders, sportspeople – who were, more often than not, men. There were very few contemporary heroes and even fewer women and people from other genders whose stories found space in the public domain.

The lack of inspiring and compelling biographies propelled us in the past few years to publish biographies of people from

various professions; these include stories on STEM professionals, dancers, artists, environmentalists, sportspersons, and many more. Each biography has also been translated into at least four Indian languages in print and even more languages on Pratham Books' digital platform, StoryWeaver, thus reaching a far wider audience across the country. While some of these books have been taken into classrooms and libraries across India as language-learning and STEM-teaching tools, they have played an even more important role in encouraging young readers to see the world from another person's point of view and be inspired to overcome their own hurdles with determination.

Introduction

For the past 19 years, Pratham Books, a publisher based out of India, has been creating engaging picture books in multiple languages and formats to help children discover the joy of reading. The books are set in locations that readers can recognize, feature characters with whom they can identify, and tell stories that capture their attention and fuel their imagination.

This paper explores how, by publishing biographies of contemporary women and men from all walks of life, Pratham Books has been able to communicate to children the incredible power and resilience of lives that inspire and present them with role models who have the ability to potentially influence their ideas and beliefs.

We believe stories open doors to new worlds and realities. In the past few years, after noticing a lack of inspiring and compelling biographies in the picture book format in the Indian market, we were propelled to publish biographies of people from various professions, including stories of STEM professionals, dancers, artists, environmentalists, and sportspersons. The focus has been to tell stories of contemporary, everyday people; stories that are real and inspiring and talk about struggles and experiences that are usually not highlighted.

The role of biographies in expanding world views

Scholar and educator Rudine Sims Bishop, when describing how literature reflects the world, said that it was like 'mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors'. Bishop advocated that literature transforms human experience and helps us see our own lives as part of a larger human experience. Sometimes it reflects our realities, at once recognizable but also alien, as we see it from a new vantage point. Sometimes it shows us a different world, inviting us to step out and experience the unfamiliar.

In this context, biographies are windows, or sliding doors. They tell stories of real people doing things in real life. They can be stories of overcoming obstacles, resilience and innovation; of people breaking stereotypes and archaic rules, and standing up for themselves. As picture book creators and publishers, we believe that these life stories present young readers with role models – personalities that inspire and help build hope, who can potentially influence ideas and beliefs positively.

Indian society is riddled with issues of gender-, caste- and religion-based discrimination, which in turn leads to unequal access to knowledge systems. We witnessed this during a visit to a community library in Bengaluru, India. A group of girls and boys were sitting on opposite sides of the room. We asked them, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' The boys wanted to be police officers, engineers, army men, or doctors. The girls remained silent. When nudged a little, a couple of them said they were not sure; the rest stayed quiet. On another occasion, in a library in Rajasthan, a group of children were surprised to see the image of a woman in a cockpit: 'We didn't know women could fly aeroplanes,' one of the girls told a team member (Pratham Books, 2022). In a small community center in Bhopal, a child wrote and drew a version of a picture book at an informal session and then said, 'I would love to know more about the lives of artists and how they think and draw.'

These instances tell us that there is an urgent need to create diverse books with role models. We believe that among the most effective agents of change in an unequal system are stories and books. Our fieldwork and interaction with children has shown that when children read or hear stories, they can be empowered to develop skills such as empathy, self-awareness, creativity, decision-making, resilience, and problem-solving. And when these stories are in the form of a biography, they present readers with role models. People who display courage, empathy, resilience, and leadership in real life can inspire readers and expand their world views and ideas of a future.

In India, as in other developing countries, there has always been a lack of access to affordable and engaging books in the non-education sphere. In an attempt to fill this ever-widening gap, Pratham Books develops low-cost, high-quality books in multiple languages and makes them available in schools, libraries, and reading rooms across the length and breadth of the country, including remote areas such as Kanyakumari in the south and Leh and Ladakh in the north. The focus has been on spreading the joy of reading in a country where more than half the children read below their grade level even after three years of schooling.

In 2019, Archana Nambiar, a research consultant with Pratham Books, visited students of Grades 6 and 7 in government schools in Bengaluru to conduct a qualitative study on the use of Pratham Books' STEM books in the school curriculum. The aim was to explore the role STEM libraries play in the development of scientific process skills or scientific inquiry, and how children's attitudes and beliefs are therefore influenced. The results were published in 2020 in an internal report entitled *Influence of Stem Libraries on the Development of Scientific Inquiry Skills.* At one of the schools, Nambiar received overwhelming feedback on the biographies. In place of the earlier biographies stocked in the library, which had fairly dry content about the personality along with black-and-white photographs, were books that were not only filled with color but

were also interesting stories. Teachers saw them as innovative teaching tools.

'Biographies play an important role in inspiring children,' says Timira Gupta, former executive director at Akshara High School, a not-for-profit school in the suburbs of Mumbai, India. This community-driven school, which started off with the idea of catering to children from nearby fishing communities, has an extremely vibrant reading and library program that is intertwined with the curriculum. The students are curious to know more about people who do interesting things in life like discovering or inventing something new. 'However,' Gupta adds, 'that does not mean that the child wants to pursue a similar interest or passion but it sparks a kernel of curiosity about the journey. In fact, biographies, while having the ability to inspire, are definitely not a genre children naturally gravitate towards. They need to be introduced and lured into knowing more about individuals who have made an impact on society.'

According to Gupta, one of the biggest reasons that children read biographies is because they are real stories about real people. When the biography is about people who are not famous or are not necessarily in the public eye but are doing something extraordinary just for their deep love for it, children are keen to read about the person's life and journey.

Kripa Bhatia, an artist who has illustrated numerous biographies, feels that biographies show there are many ways of being. For instance, biographies of transgender people break stereotypes of gender binaries; or biographies of human rights activists show the lifelong struggle to stand up for someone else's rights. Children may gain new perspectives from biographies of heroes from marginalized communities, who have fought against caste, race, gender, and/or class discrimination and for the right to exist in a world ruled by majoritarianism. Finally, biographies of environmental activists are also important as they highlight movements for the rights of rivers, seas, oceans, and trees.

Who we chose to create books about

Until recently, most biographies published in India were based on popular names in the public sphere – freedom fighters, politicians, sportspeople, and actors – who were, more often than not, men. There were very few contemporary heroes and even fewer women and transgender people whose stories found space in the public domain. There were even fewer biographies in the picture book format, i.e., books in which the 'story depends on the interaction between the written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention.'

Through our conversations with children, librarians, and educators, we have realized that while children might not naturally gravitate towards biographies, they are keen to know how people live their lives and achieve their goals. They are eager to read inspirational and relatable stories.

One of the most important editorial decisions we have made was to commission 'own voices' writers and illustrators. In a country as diverse as India, we run the risk of repeating stories of people from the mainstream, leaving out a huge number of people and children who are not seen or heard. We try to create a space in which creators, be they authors or illustrators, from minority communities get to tell the stories they want to tell in their own ways.

One such example is *B.R. Ambedkar: A Life in Books*, written by Yogesh Maitreya and illustrated by Nidhin Shobhana. At a time when Dalits were ostracized in society by the upper-caste people who had a stronghold on education, B.R. Ambedkar was one of the first Dalits to complete school and get higher education. He became a champion of social justice and human rights for the Dalit Bahujan, and was a brilliant lawyer who chaired the drafting committee of India's constitution. With this book, the creators stepped away from the story of Babasaheb – as Bhimrao Ambedkar is popularly known – as it has always been told and written. This book, created by people deeply involved in the community, shows us a different

side to Babasaheb – his love for books and reading. By writing about an intimate aspect of Babasaheb's life, Maitreya has given children a glimpse into how Babasaheb turned to books and eventually used knowledge as a tool to agitate against oppression.

Tine and the Faraway Mountain, written by Shikha Tripathi and illustrated by Ogin Nayam, is based on the life of a woman mountaineer from Arunachal Pradesh in North East India. Nayam is himself from the region and is an 'own voices' illustrator. Tripathi, although not from the region, interviewed Tine Mena extensively for the book, which tells the story of how Tine worked tirelessly to create space for herself in the male-dominated world of mountain climbing. In 2011, 25-year-old Tine was the first woman from North East India to climb Everest. She has been a source of inspiration for adventurous children around her, including her cousin, Ruby Lombo, a cycling athlete.

In the last few years, STEM biographies have garnered a great deal of interest. Some interesting stories have centered on women doing pathbreaking work in science and technology. One of the earliest biographies of women in STEM to be commissioned was *Anna's Extraordinary Experiments with Weather*. Written by Nandita Jayaraj and illustrated by Priya Kuriyan, it is about the Indian physicist and meteorologist Anna Mani who was a voracious reader. The book shows her eighth birthday party when she asked her parents to give her a set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* and then follows her extraordinary scientific adventures. *Cracking the Code: Women Who Have Changed the Way We Look at Computers*, written by Alisha Sadikot and illustrated by Shreyas R. Krishnan, looks at women in the world of technology from across almost a century. The book includes, among others, the 19th-century English mathematician Ada Lovelace, who wrote the world's first computer program; Audrey Tang, Taiwan's Digital Minister and the first transgender person in the country's cabinet, who is working to make government paperless; and Freshteh Forough, the young Afghani woman who started the first coding school for women in Afghanistan.

Grace: One Engineer's Fight to Make Science Education Accessible for All, written by Sayantan Datta and illustrated by Priya Dali, is the biography of Grace Banu, a pathbreaking anti-caste and transgender-rights activist. Grace sought legal help and was the first transgender person to gain admission into an engineering college in Tamil Nadu, India. She completed her education despite financial struggles and has a degree in electronics and electrical engineering. She continues to use the power of the judiciary to make education in science and technology accessible to transgender people.

The Girl Who Thinks in Numbers: Data Warrior Prukalpa Sankar, written by Shreyasi Singh and illustrated by Rai, is about data scientist Prukalpa Sankar who has used data to bring about change in Indian villages. This book is important because it highlights data mining, one of the most coveted professions today, and a young woman who led this massive change. Prukalpa and her team have helped introduce computers and internet to over ten million women across 12 states and a million villages in India; and brought clean cooking fuel to 50 million women over three years. Another biography of a woman in science is *Sudipta Sengupta: The Rock Reader*, written by Veena Prasad and illustrated by Manjari Chakravarti. Sudipta Sengupta is the first Indian geologist to work in Antarctica as a part of India's first research station. The book highlighted Sengupta's journey to get into the expedition as well as her work, giving children a peek into a field that is not very popular in the mainstream for most people. Both books had a high number of voluntary readers as reported in the study, *Influence of STEM Libraries on the Development of Scientific Inquiry Skills*, conducted on Pratham Books' STEM publications. 'These biographies not only helped children realize the value of STEM in their everyday lives but also that they could actually opt for a career in STEM,' says Archana Nambiar.

According to the annual All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report, which indicates enrolment in undergraduate, Master's, and PhD-level programs, the number of women in India who have opted for STEM courses has increased from 1,002,707 in

2017–18 to 1,056,095 in 2019–2020, while the number of men opting for STEM courses has declined. But only 14% of these women currently go on to have STEM-related careers after completing their secondary education. We hope these biographies will inspire a new generation of women to break gender barriers and take up professions in these fields.

Other notable STEM biographies include *EC George Sudarshan: The Man Who Loved Physics*, written by Ananya Dasgupta and illustrated by Siddhi Vartak, and *Sir M. Visvesvaraya: The Builder of Dams, Bridges and a Nation*, written by Mala Kumar and illustrated by Krupa Thakur-Patil, Sachin Pandit and Sheshadri Mokshagundam. Ananya Dasgupta considers writing the biography of EC George Sudarshan, a physicist and nine-time Nobel prize nominee, to be an important step. Here was a man from a minority community, who had grown up in a humble village household and overcome numerous odds to discover a new law of nature. M. Visvesvaraya, an engineer from the early 1900s, is credited with building various structures – from dams to bridges – and taking India towards industrialization. Children in Bengaluru are quite familiar with his name as there are museums and educational institutions in the city that have been named after him. So, when students, according to the above STEM study, read his biography, they could easily connect to the book as well as Visvesvaraya and were inspired to contribute to society in similar ways.

Sustainability and environment are key issues that concern humanity today and there are many eco-champions and communities who have been doing stellar work. In the past few years, we have endeavored to tell stories of people working in areas of climate change, conservation, and sustainability. With these stories we hope to give children a glimpse into the people who are not part of the mainstream narrative but are actively working in non-urban areas and from minority communities to conserve the environment, and hopefully encourage them to do the same in their lives. One of our first environmental biographies was the story of Zakhuma Don: *Walking in the Wild*, written by Sejal Mehta and

illustrated by Barkha Lohia. Zakhuma Don is a forest guard and wildlife photographer, and a part of the anti-poaching team of the Mizoram Forest Department. As a forest guard, Zakhuma has been actively involved in ensuring animals are protected from poachers and also spreading awareness about the importance of preserving the forest and its wildlife. His photographs of Dampa's biodiversity are a huge addition to archival work around the forest. Based on Mehta's interviews with Don, this conscious decision to tell the story of a forest guard as opposed to a conservationist was made to give children a glimpse not only into a different career, but also into the everyday life of an unsung hero of conservation.

The Grass Seeker, written by Uddalak Gupta and photographed by Ruhani Kaur, is not a biography in the conventional sense as it does not look at the life story of an individual. Instead, it looks at a season in the life of a Gaddi shepherd, a nomadic tribe that readers outside the region may not know about. Every summer, Room Singh, a Gaddi shepherd who lives in the foothills of the Himalayas, scales the upper heights with his flock so that they can feed. With global warming and climate change a reality, the book traces the journey that this Gaddi shepherd has been making and his immensely motivating ecological footprint. This biography is an important addition because it highlights how people in the margins, who are often invisible, can take actions with the potential to have the maximum impact.

The Seed Savers, written by Bijal Vachharajani and illustrated by Jayesh Sivan, is the story of a remote village in Odisha where the women got together to open a seed bank. We need seeds for everything, such as our food and clothes. While one saves money in a bank, at a seed bank, seeds that might go extinct are saved locally by women farmers. This biography of a community reveals an environmental crisis and how people living on the fringes exhibit life skills like decision-making and working in groups when their existence is threatened.

The possibilities in art and culture are immense. Art in practice encourages motor skills, neural development, and also problem-

solving skills. Art in therapy helps children process the world in a non-judgemental, interpretative manner. It is therefore no surprise that biographies of artists are of great importance. *The Secret World of Mehlli Gobhai: The Man Who Found Art Everywhere*, written by Jerry Pinto and illustrated by Kripa Bhatia, looks at the abstract artist Mehlli Gobhai's interesting life that spanned from Mumbai to New York, his inspiration, and his love for India. The book delves into an artist's mind and motivates children by telling them that there is no one way of creating art – inspiration can be found everywhere. Bhatia feels that biographies expose children to real-life stories of resilience and hard work. According to her, biographies of artists are especially important because artists live very differently and they show us that there is no one way to live: there are alternate careers and choices. Sanika Dhakephalkar of Bookworm, a community library in Goa, echoes the sentiment. For her, one of the most effective ways to introduce art as a skill and career to children in the library has been to read them biographies of artists. *The Secret World of Mehlli Gobhai* and Mehlli's interest in abstract art, and another work of his, *The Tree Book*, helped her design the Tree Book Project with members. For this project, children across age groups drew their idea of a tree.

A Song in Space: Kesarbai Kerkar, written by Neha Singh and illustrated by Shubhshree Mathur, tells of a singer who performed in the first half of the 20th century. Kesarbai fought insurmountable odds to make a career in the Indian classical musical industry. She performed in public when it was unthinkable for women to be seen without a veil, let alone perform. Kesarbai stopped singing at the prime of her career in the 1960s, but her voice was the only one from India that was included in the *Sounds of Earth* vinyl recording that was sent into space. Here was a champion of music at a time when women were considered voiceless.

Yet another rousing tale is *Kali Wants to Dance*. Published in 2018, it is one of the earliest biographies to highlight the life of a person in the margins. This book, written by Aparna Karthikeyan and illustrated by Somesh Kumar, is the story of Kali Veerapathiran,

a hero in Kovalam, his village in Tamil Nadu. According to the People's Archive of Rural India, at 25, Kali was perhaps the only male dancer who had mastered Bharatanatyam as well as three ancient Tamil folk dance forms. The book has traveled far and wide and has received a fantastic response from children. At the Swabhimaan Library in Bengaluru, after a reading of the book, children – both boys and girls – enthusiastically showed off their dance moves. And at G.P. Prof School Varuda in Maharashtra's Osmanabad district, where Pratham Books was piloting a gender workshop in collaboration with UNICEF, a boy studying in grade 5 walked up to the facilitator and said how reading the book helped him realize that his dream of opening a beauty parlor was valid and that he felt empowered to pursue a career in the field.

Using biographies in the classroom

Picture book biographies have taken off in a big way in the past few years. Some biographies of unsung heroes highlight one exciting incident while others span entire lives. They are undoubtedly one of the best ways to bring interesting lives alive and nudge students to probe deeper about a time, period, person, and motivations. As Hani Morgan explains (2009), 'Educators can guide students to develop cross-cultural understanding at an early age by using well-written picture book biographies which represent people from diverse backgrounds.'

Our books have travelled to classrooms as ancillary material to textbooks. One such example is Akshara High School, Mumbai, where they have a book week every year. In 2022, they chose the biography, *The Secret World of Mehlli Gobhai*: *The Man Who Found Art Everywhere*, and used it under the topic 'Art in Books'. The school invited Kripa Bhatia, the illustrator of the book, who took children through the process of crafting the book as well as Gobhai's paintings, which find a prominent place in the biography. The participants were children from grades 4 and 5 and the key to this exercise was to introduce children to the work

of a great abstract artist and understand his style, his journey, and the time he worked in.

Kripa Bhatia has also conducted other classroom sessions and says it has always been interesting to receive reactions from children when they hear about Mehlli's quirkiness. Bhatia, who works with children in underserved communities, says that when she showed the book to children from these communities, they were most drawn to the fact that while Indians who travel typically appreciate how clean it is abroad, Mehlli appreciated and craved for the muddy waters in Indian rivers as well as the moss, fungus, and dirt that carried their own life forms. 'These children had never heard of a career like becoming a visual artist. They had never seen artist biographies before or even visited an art gallery,' she adds.

Cracking the Code was used for the computer science project for grade 5 and then later as a topic during the Science week at Akshara High School. In both instances, the children read the book first and then chose three women from the book and did further research on them. Later, the children narrowed in on the various science projects mentioned in the book, did more in-depth research and then presented on the same.

Another book used in the school was *B.R. Ambedkar: A Life in Books*. It was an ancillary to their curriculum when they were reading about India's struggle for Independence. The school, instead of following the textbook, decided to curate a list of books on eight to ten men and women who had made the most significant impact in India's freedom movement.

While a few of our books have found their way into schools and textbooks, a recent example of one of our biographies being used for language-learning is Shikha Tripathi and Ogin Nayam's *Tine and the Faraway Mountain*. The book made it to the grade 4 syllabus of several CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) schools in India for the academic year 2021–22. As part of the English textbook, the story is followed up with comprehension-based questions as well as questions on vocabulary and grammar.

Biographies in multiple languages as tools for access

Pratham Books' print catalogue includes over 700 titles in 24 languages. In 2015, recognizing the huge lacunae in access to print books, the publishing house moved towards establishing an open-licence innovative digital platform called StoryWeaver. The platform houses not just in-house titles but gives access to digital books from other publishers as well. Currently, there are over 51,000 books in over 331 languages, which have been accessed by millions of readers free of charge.

While on-ground research tells us that books published by Pratham Books go into classrooms as language-teaching tools, it has been noticed that there is a greater need for books in the mother tongue. Studies show that mother tongue is a key factor in inclusion and quality learning; it improves academic performance and learning outcomes and usually nudges children to be more curious because of the comfort factor (UNESCO, 2022). The more languages the books are created in, the wider the access that children can have to high quality content that spreads the joy of reading, which in turn leads to exposure to different world views and life skills.

Pratham Books develops all titles in a minimum of four Indian languages – Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, and Hindi (all translated by the in-house translation department) – as well as English. On StoryWeaver, community translators help expand the reach by translating the stories into over 300 languages. Language has helped these books cross regional barriers. For instance, a child sitting in a village in South India can now be deeply inspired by the life led by Zakhuma Don, a forest guard and wildlife photographer in North East India.

Conclusion

Our picture book biographies have been used as reading material beyond textbooks, to help children learn more about a place and time and also develop empathy and multiple perspectives. They

help children to understand problem-solving, learn new ways to innovate, and the aspiration to say, 'I can do it, too'.

Thus, we are committed to creating more biographies of people from diverse backgrounds, of contemporary people who inspire and innovate and break stereotypes every step of the way. We do this with the goal of helping young readers to hope, believe, and understand that their dreams need not be limited by their gender, caste, religion, or class.

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16

TESOL textbook content in the global South:

Challenges and opportunities for appropriate and sustainable learning

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Abstract

This brief investigates the content of textbooks used for the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in basic education (primary and secondary) in the global South. It identifies key challenges in this area of materials development, analyzes current content tendencies in textbooks, and discusses affordances typically available for making content appropriate to learner needs, accessible to learner schemata, and facilitative of learning. Through analysis of 32 textbooks from 15 countries in Africa and Asia, it identifies three common authorship scenarios (exogenous, mixed, and endogenous authorship), which are found to have differing influences on textbook content. The findings reveal two broad types of textbook (those produced by local and those produced by multinational publishers), which differ in their tendencies in a range of areas, including skills practice, explicit language focus, and topic choices for units and texts. The chapter concludes by considering how locally appropriate balances between the tendencies identified may be found, including through more effective localization and learner-orientation in text choice and through the use of balanced authorship teams with awareness of teachers' and learners' needs alongside textbook writing expertise.

Introduction

Textbooks constitute arguably the single most important artefact available for supporting learning in basic education worldwide (UNESCO, 2016). While high-quality textbooks are capable of facilitating learning effectively, reducing teacher preparation load and supporting progress towards greater learner autonomy, low-quality textbooks can become a barrier to learner cognitive development and access to curriculum content (Smart & Jagannathan, 2018). Although the centrality of textbooks may decline worldwide as more classrooms become digitalized and gain access to multimedia and online resources, textbooks remain central to education in low-resourced classrooms, as typically found across the global South. This is particularly true in the teaching of additional languages such as English as a foreign or second language, when they may constitute the sole source for learners' and teachers' exposure to the target language, particularly through the written texts that are so important for reading skills practice, contextualized language analysis, and as inspiration for productive skills activities (Richards, 2014).

However, the quality of learning facilitated by textbooks used in many English language classrooms in the global South is frequently compromised by the quality of the textbooks themselves; some may be too challenging or overly ambitious in their progress, particularly for the most disadvantaged learners in a given curricular context, others may include content that is schematically unfamiliar or unengaging to learners, and others still may have an inappropriate balance of focus on specific skills or systems (e.g., an overemphasis on explicit grammar practice or reading comprehension). These challenges often originate in national or state-level curricula, but may be exacerbated if textbook writers lack either the materials

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writing expertise or the intimate knowledge required of any given curricular context to produce materials that are culturally and developmentally appropriate for learners and facilitative of learning that achieves intended curricular outcomes. As a result, textbooks used in low-income contexts all too often contribute to the numerous challenges that teachers and learners face, rather than alleviating these challenges. As such, it can be argued that identifying means by which textbooks can be made more appropriate to learners' and teachers' needs and promote learning is a priority in international educational development initiatives, as noted in all three volumes of *NISSEM Global Briefs* to date.

This brief will begin by exploring the most pressing challenges related to writing textbooks for the teaching of English in the global South. It will then present the findings of an informal qualitative analysis of 32 textbooks from varied contexts across the global South, identifying two broad tendencies within these textbooks. The subsequent discussion will identify ways in which, in the opinion of the author, important affordances and opportunities can be capitalized upon, even in the typically less than ideal circumstances in which textbooks are commissioned, written and used in the South, to offer a number of potentially useful observations both for textbook authorship teams themselves, and for curricular authorities responsible for commissioning and revising textbooks. It aims to offer constructive critique based on the author's awareness of current realities and challenges, gained from having lived and worked in countries in Africa and Asia.

Terminology

The term TESOL (teaching of English to speakers of other languages) is used in this brief as a superordinate for what applied linguists typically label EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) contexts. While the latter term is typically used for countries in which English plays some (often official) role in society, it is frequently the case that, despite this role,

the majority of learners living in rural areas in lower-income ESL countries (e.g., India, Nigeria, Kenya) experience similar levels of exposure to English as learners in EFL contexts worldwide (see, e.g., Annamalai, 2005; Arnold & Rixon, 2008).

Given the need for this brief to focus on specific curricular contexts, which typically correspond to either national or state-level educational authorities, the term 'global South' is used to refer to any states or countries classed as either low-income or lower-middle income by the World Bank (2022) at the time of writing.

The term 'textbook' is used here rather than 'coursebook'. The latter term is prevalent in the discourse of TESOL materials design (e.g., Tomlinson, 2011) and indicates that it is part of a larger 'course' offered by a publisher (including audio content, online material, student workbook, etc.). However, teachers working in the global South typically have access only to the textbook itself, sometimes also an accompanying teacher's guide (these are often the sole components (e.g., Baig et al., 2021). The term 'textbook' is also more common in the mainstream (K12) educational discourse, the main context of relevance for this brief.

The challenges of TESOL textbook authorship for the global South

Writers of textbooks for use in mainstream education across the planet face multiple, complex, interrelated challenges. Foremost among these are the needs to balance carefully between the syllabus requirements of national or state curricula, the needs and preferences of learners that they have never met, and the expectations and beliefs of teachers who are expected to use these textbooks (Bell & Gower, 2011). To these we can add the need for textbook writers to adopt clear, principled and culturally appropriate methodologies, communicate these effectively to teachers, and implement them consistently throughout the materials (Graves, 2021). Writers of textbooks for use in contexts across the global South often face a number of additional challenges.

For example, curricula in the South are frequently found to be overloaded or overambitious (Pritchett & Beatty, 2012, 2015), including a large number of content areas, some of which may be inappropriate for the subject or level in question, culturally alien to the background and contexts of the learners, or even methodologically unfamiliar to the teacher. Another challenge often exacerbated in the global South is the large variability in levels of disadvantage and school readiness among learners within a specific curricular context that are typically evident when learners from urban and rural areas are compared (Anderson, 2023). Significant variation in learner attainment is often found between these two background types (e.g., Buckler, 2011; Mulkeen, 2005).

As such, it is evident that authors writing textbook material for contexts in the global South need both a high level of expertise in textbook writing itself and extensive knowledge of the context in question, something that can only usually be gained as a result of many years of living (and ideally teaching) in this context. Unfortunately, it is frequently the case that textbook authors writing for the global South have either one or the other of these two qualities (rarely both), with the following two author profiles particularly evident among TESOL textbook writers:

i.   Local authors who work either directly for the Ministry of Education (MOE) or for private publishing companies. Such authors typically have extensive knowledge about the curricular context in question but may lack either prior experience as classroom teachers or sufficient training in materials development and textbook writing (Smart, 2019).
ii. Experienced 'international' authors, who have considerable expertise writing materials for different national contexts. However, because such authors typically have a personal background in a higher-income national context (e.g., Anglophone countries such as the U.K. or the U.S.), they often lack knowledge about the specific curricular context for a given textbook.

Further, while some TESOL textbooks are written solely by local authors, and others by international authors, a common third scenario is that a generic 'global textbook', initially written by international authors (often for a large-scale multinational publishing company), is adapted by local authors with the aim of 'localizing' the material as much as possible. However, such localization is often limited, either due to practicalities (e.g., of rewriting sections) and cost (e.g., of recommissioning artwork), or due to copyright restrictions of large international publishing companies which prevent extensive modification of content, structure or methodology, making adaptation to the local curriculum or learner needs difficult, if not impossible (Gray, 2002).

Thus, we can identify what we might call three 'authorship scenarios', henceforth referred to as follows:

i.   Exogenous authorship: a textbook written by an international authorship team working for a multinational publisher.
ii.   Mixed authorship: a textbook initially written by an international authorship team and then adapted to some extent by a local authorship team; these are also usually published by multinational publishers, sometimes in partnership with a local organization.
iii. Endogenous authorship: a textbook written by local authors working for a local publisher and/or MOE.

As the analysis below will show, these differing scenarios typically lead to noticeably different textbooks as products. The subsequent discussion will consider their relative potential merits and weaknesses critically.

Analysis of selected TESOL textbooks from countries across the global South

In order to identify and better understand variations in TESOL textbook writing practices for the global South, the author of this brief analysed selected units from 32 textbooks from 15 different low-

and lower-middle income countries in Africa and Asia (Bangladesh, Benin, Cameroon, DRC, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, India, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, and Uzbekistan). The choice of these textbooks was largely opportunistic, either involving materials already in my possession, or drawing upon personal contacts in each country who were able to provide copies of materials being used in mainstream secondary education (Grades 6–12).

Each textbook unit was analyzed from a range of perspectives, including methodological considerations (e.g., evidence of the inclusion of communicative, task-based, or project-based learning were seen as broad markers of more communicative approaches in the units), the balance of skills practice encouraged in activities (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening), the balance of focus on different 'systems'-related content (i.e., grammar, lexis, and pronunciation), thematic choices for unit content and texts, and consideration of more specific focuses concerning the extent to which both 'global issues' (including those prioritized in UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.7) and 'didactic content' (with a specific moral or instructional aim) were incorporated in the unit. The choice to focus on these perspectives (methodology, skills, systems, and content focus) is influenced partly by academic discussion of materials development for English Language Teaching (ELT) (see, e.g., Arnold & Rixon, 2008; Richards, 2014) and partly by the themes that emerged through analysis of the materials themselves (Thomas, 2006), with the tendencies discussed below representing the areas of most prominent difference with regard to these focuses. Author subjectivity is acknowledged in these value judgements and is discussed further below.

Pattern tendencies in the sample: Two broad types of textbook

Eleven textbooks in the sample were found to be written either by an exogenous or mixed authorship and published by multinational publishing houses (e.g., Cambridge University Press, EDICEF, Macmillan). The remaining 23 textbooks were of endogenous authorship (as far as this could be ascertained) and published either by government-affiliated publishers or local commercial publishing companies in the country in question, occasionally with international authors in a 'consultant' role. While there were both individual and regional variation within these two groups (discussed further below), the most obvious tendencies identified in the areas analyzed related to differences between these two groups. These differences are summarized in Table 1 and discussed below.

The first group of differences in Table 1 (rows 1–3) relates to the inclusion and balance of skills practice activities in units (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening). Generally speaking, textbooks written by multinational publishers were more likely to have a wider range of skills practice and a stronger focus on speaking and listening skills within each unit; texts were typically shorter and included a wider range of text genres. In contrast, textbooks written by local publishers typically had longer reading texts (often one per unit), fewer listening texts, and a primary focus on text comprehension in the accompanying activities. Rather than being integrated into text-related activities, speaking and writing activities were more likely to come towards the end of the unit (if at all), and were less obviously linked to key texts. Texts were more likely to be expository or narrative, covering a narrower range of genres than the global textbooks.

The second group of differences (rows 4–6) might be seen to relate to methodological considerations, including the extent to which there are explicit focuses on grammar, lexis and pronunciation as well as opportunities for more meaningful, productive language use particularly through communicative or project-based activities. Textbooks written by multinational publishers typically had at least one opportunity for such meaningful language use in each unit, even if these were fairly controlled practice opportunities. They typically had at least one activity in each unit that focused on building learners' explicit

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	Area of difference (tendencies only)	Textbooks produced by local publishers		Textbooks produced by multinational publishers
1	Length of texts	Usually longer	↔	Usually shorter
2	Explicit integration of two or more skills in an activity	Lower likelihood	↔	Higher likelihood
3	Inclusion of activities involving pre-recorded listening texts	Lower likelihood	↔	Higher likelihood
4	Inclusion of a regular (once a unit) explicit focus on lexis and pronunciation	Lower likelihood	↔	Higher likelihood
5	Inclusion of extensive (more than one page) explicit focus on grammar	Higher likelihood	↔	Lower likelihood
6	Inclusion of learning activities with a communicative, task- or project-based aim	Lower likelihood	↔	Higher likelihood
7	Topic choices for units	Nationally specific and more varied	↔	Typical TESOL topics (following the 'PARSNIP' rule)
8	Evidence of didactic content (moral messages) in texts included	Higher likelihood	↔	Lower likelihood
9	Inclusion of 'global issues' (e.g. civic education, women's rights, AIDS awareness) in texts included	Higher likelihood	↔	Lower likelihood
10	Nation-building focus	Often present	↔	Rarely present

● **Table 1.** Tendency differences by textbooks according to publisher type

grammar knowledge, at least one that focused on building lexical knowledge, and often one with a focus on an aspect of pronunciation. Textbooks written by local publishers did sometimes include project-based writing and speaking activities, although these were less frequently found than in textbooks by multinational publishers. Interestingly, while many locally produced textbooks had quite extensive sections focusing on aspects of grammar (often including extensive practice activities such as gap-fill and sentence completion exercises), they were less likely than the multinationally-published textbooks to also include explicit focuses on lexis and pronunciation, although some did include glossaries in which important lexis was either translated or glossed in simple English.

The third group of differences relates to the choice of themes for units and topics for texts in the two different groups (rows 7–10). Textbooks produced by multinational publishers tended to base unit themes on what might be seen as consumer-focused topics, such as food and cuisine, travel and transport, house and accommodation, etc. A smaller number of themes that might be seen to be of global importance were also found, most commonly in a unit focusing on environmental concerns (consistent with prior research; UNESCO, 2016). Unsurprisingly, no texts were found in these textbooks that broke the PARSNIP rule (a rule followed by global textbook writers to avoid texts on Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Sex, Narcotics, '-isms', or Pork; see Gray, 2002). In contrast, while consumer-focused topics were also present in locally-produced textbooks, they were often given a clear national flavor (e.g., units on cuisine compared regional food from within the country, rather than food from different countries around the world). There was a much higher likelihood of local textbooks also including more socially-focused topics of local relevance (often including local stories to illustrate these), such as farming practices, local culture, history or politics, and national figures of importance; many of these texts also contained a moral or didactic element, either through a fable-

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type format or through how a topic, event or person is presented. Alongside these, a number of the local textbooks also included expository texts dealing with themes typically categorized as global issues (e.g., aspects of civic education, women's rights, AIDS awareness, or sustainable livelihoods). Because themes for local textbooks are selected on a national or state level, they were sometimes found to include texts which would be excluded from multinationally-published textbooks due to the PARSNIP rule. For example, the first unit of a Grade 9 textbook from Pakistan approaches the theme of 'Ethics – character building' through a text presenting 'The last sermon of the holy prophet Muhammad' (see Figure 1). A further topic-related tendency evident in locally published textbooks that was almost entirely absent in textbooks produced by multinational publishers was a nation-building focus, introducing learners to aspects of culture, cuisine, religion(s) and geography of their country, and often stressing diversity, particularly in countries with a greater ethnic, cultural or linguistic diversity. This is well-illustrated in Figure 2, in a Grade 6 textbook from Cameroon.

Perhaps the most apparent visual difference (not included in Table 1), which was obvious on initial appraisal, was the higher likelihood of textbooks produced by multinational publishers having a more graphically complex page design, with multiple colors on each page, a wider range of fonts and stylistic features, and close integration of images with texts, consistent with what Rinvolucri critically refers to as the 'sub-journalistic, woman's magazine world of EFLese course materials' (1999, p. 14). While textbooks produced by local publishers were usually also professionally designed, formatting was more likely to be simpler, including single text columns rather than double, and less extensive use of images, icons, and color.

Figure 1. Grade 9 textbook extract from Pakistan

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Listening and speaking

1. Look at the picture on the previous page carefully and discuss these questions in groups.
   a) Where do the people come from?
   b) What details in the illustration told you this?
   c) What do you think the people are doing?
   d) Do you think it is important to interact with your peers? Explain.
   e) Who are the adults in your neighbourhood?
   f) What do the adults in your neighbourhood do for a living?
   g) Do the adults in your neighbourhood know you?
   h) When did you last interact with them? What did you say?
   i) Are you happy in your neighbourhood?
   j) How do you contribute to ensure that your neighbourhood is a harmonious, happy place?

2. Listen carefully to a text about people from different parts of Cameroon.

3. Listen to your teacher again. Match the names with the people in the picture.

| Etoundi | Chungong | Maimouna | Estelle | Elinge |

● **Figure 2**. Grade 6 textbook extract from Cameroon

Other tendencies within the sample

Textbooks analyzed from the Indian subcontinent (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan) were found to have a larger number of expository texts describing especially people, but also places and events of national (and sometimes local) importance than those from other regions in the sample. These were texts with a clearly unambiguous patriotic focus and didactic intent to teach learners about their national heritage, often portraying important national figures as role models for learners to follow. For example, Unit 1 of Bangladesh's Grade 9–10 textbook incorporates four sequential 'lessons' on the topic of a single person, the founding father of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu (known internationally as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman); see Figure 3.

While the tendencies described above are evident in the larger sample analyzed, they should be understood specifically as tendencies, given that there is also significant variation within the two textbook groups themselves. For example, several of the locally-published textbooks displayed many of the features of the multinationally-published textbooks. This can be seen in higher secondary textbooks from Djibouti, which, while locally published and situated, all included fairly short texts of a wide range of genres alongside fairly communicative activities and balanced focuses on grammar, lexis, and pronunciation (see Figure 4), all features that were usually indicative of multinationally-published textbooks. There was also some evidence of textbooks produced by multinational publishers that included some degree of national localization, even if this was typically limited to changes in place names and people, rather than selecting topic-specific texts that originated in the national context in question. More typically, these global textbooks were localized to continent (e.g., generic African) or subregion (e.g., East Africa or Francophone West Africa).

Figure 3. Grade 9–10 textbook extract from Bangladesh

Figure 4. Grade 10 textbook extract from Djibouti

Discussion

Any evaluative discussion of textbook design and content must always be carefully framed within a wider understanding of the highly complex relationship between context, culture and political history on the one hand, and issues to do with methodology, curricular priorities, and notions of 'best practice' on the other (see, e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 1994; Tabulawa, 2003). Any author attempting such an evaluation should always make clear their own background and position, particularly in the field of language teaching and learning, where aspects of theory and related practice are complex and contested. As a materials writer and methodologist from the U.K. (where I was originally trained as a language teacher and then teacher educator), I have typically promoted learner-centred, communicative approaches in my own writing (e.g., Anderson, 2006, 2019). However, my experiences of working in over 30 countries worldwide, and living for extended periods in eight of these (four in the global South), have also afforded frequent opportunities to observe the incompatibility of such materials in many non-Western contexts, and this broader awareness (see, e.g., Anderson, 2016, 2020, 2023) informs the critical discussion of the likely relative efficacy of specific textbook-writing practices below.

Issues of localization

Perhaps the most important tendencies identified in the above analysis relate to the extent to which both unit themes and topics for texts are seen as 'global', regionalized (e.g., West African) or localized to a specific national context. Internationally-marketable content of the type that typically appears in global textbooks for adult and teen learners in private language schools worldwide was generally uncommon in the sample, but nonetheless present to some extent in those textbooks that had solely exogenous authorships. In Uzbekistan, for example, such textbooks were being used at both secondary and primary level at the time of writing

(2022), where learners' own ethnicity, culture and social practices (e.g. games) are replaced by images of 'subtly deterritorialized' (Gray, 2002, p. 157) multiracial classes engaging in generic, yet typically Western (e.g., involving consumer culture) social practices. While these textbooks clearly model inclusive behavior and social harmony, the comparative lack of direct references to learners' own culture is likely to be less effective in facilitating learning from a constructivist point of view, within which the importance of building new learning on current knowledge and schemata (much of which is culturally specific) is emphasized (e.g., Kintsch, 2009). Further, the choice of such Western over nationally specific content may reduce learner social-emotional engagement with content, if, for example, as I once found out while teaching in Rwanda, learners have never heard of, nor seen, certain food products displayed in a textbook image. While a number of the textbooks produced by multinational publishers overcame some of these barriers through a process of regionalization (e.g., all of the textbooks analyzed from countries in sub-Saharan Africa portrayed a majority of black people, and those multinational textbooks from Francophone African countries were also likely to use common Francophone African names for characters portrayed), options are much more limited than in a textbook written for a specific national context, where, for example, a number of the PARSNIP restrictions can be disregarded and topics and people of national importance can be included, explored and linked to other areas of the curriculum (e.g., social studies, civic education, etc.).

Issues of pace and progress towards curricular goals

Given the extensive evidence in the wider literature that curricula are frequently inappropriate or overambitious in the global South (Anderson, 2023; Pritchett & Beatty 2012, 2015), particularly for rural learners, a key consideration in the evaluation of textbooks concerns the extent to which they are consistent with learners' developmental needs or oriented primarily to curricular

expectations.[1] While the analysis conducted for this study did not compare textbook content to local curricula, a comparison of the structure of textbooks produced by multinational publishing companies in different countries where these textbooks are used (e.g., EDICEF textbooks in Francophone West Africa, or Cambridge University Press global titles being used in different countries) revealed an important insight across most (not all) textbooks being produced by these companies for contexts in the global South: that they are entirely or largely identical in structure and pace regardless of the specific needs, challenges, and prior literacies of learners in different curricular contexts. These challenges can vary greatly depending on, for example, the extent to which English is present in the wider community, how close English is to other languages in their repertoire, how many other additional languages they are studying, and how many written alphabets they need to gain literacy in. Further, as Kramsch (2002) shows, there can be large, important differences in the content and aims of English language learning curricula in different contexts; such differences obviously cannot easily be accommodated if generic textbooks are used regardless of context.

There was also evidence of text complexity (particularly concerning lexis) varying noticeably, even within units in a number of the textbooks analysed and invariably in those produced by local publishers. While analysis of grading and recycling of lexis within and between units was not conducted for this study, it can be noted that most multinational textbook publishers require authors to adopt a principled, graded approach to the introduction and recycling of lexis within units and textbooks in order to facilitate learner-independent reading comprehension and acquisition of lexis throughout the course of study, and this practice may not always be followed by authors who lack training in this area.

[1] Also see Pratham's 'teaching at the right level' initiative
www.teachingattherightlevel.org

Issues of skills practice

Although differences in the area of skills practice were not great, there was generally a higher likelihood of textbooks produced by multinational publishers including a stronger focus on oral skills (speaking and listening) than those textbooks published locally. Reasons for these differences are hard to speculate on, but they may reflect differences in curricular requirements, differences in methodological beliefs between exogenous and endogenous authors, or differences in awareness of the practical realities of teaching and learning languages in the global South (e.g., the challenge of teaching and assessing oral skills in large classes; Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013). However, given the increasing need for learners across the global South to be able to read and write in English in order to access higher secondary and tertiary education in their own countries, it could be argued that it is prudent for textbook authors to focus more on developing English written literacy, at least initially, in such contexts. However, this is a complex issue, and it may be the case, for example, that learners may benefit both social-emotionally and cognitively from meaningful, spoken language activities such as the inclusion of role-plays, projects and tasks in the classroom, which may then impact positively on the development of other skills. My own research into teacher expertise in the global South indicates that both approaches can achieve locally-valued outcomes (Anderson, 2023).

Issues of monolingual or multilingual pedagogy

One of the potential affordances of English language textbooks being produced locally is the possibility of their including support for learning through the use of languages that are more familiar to learners, such as their mother tongue or an established language in the school or wider community – what Durairajan (2017) has called 'more enabled' languages. However, there was little evidence of the use of other languages in any of the textbooks analyzed, despite

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a minority of the curricular contexts involved having a dominant language in the state or national education system (e.g. Bangla in Bangladesh, Marathi in Maharashtra, Uzbek in Uzbekistan, etc.). This lack of local language support in printed materials may be a relic of policy-based resistance to moves away from the English-only approaches that largely dominated twentieth-century language teaching (Cook, 2010), and may continue in many countries despite the more recent multilingual turn in TESOL (see May, 2014). It was noticeable that the only consistent use of other languages was the inclusion of French language end-of-unit glossaries in textbooks produced by multinational publishers for Francophone West Africa. Nonetheless, as Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) have recently argued, locally produced textbooks are better able to exploit such opportunities to facilitate the use of local languages, even when there are several languages present in the class. Modern publishing software and print-on-demand technologies are making this increasingly easier, enabling textbooks to be localized at a subnational level through, for example, the inclusion of mother tongue glossaries in textbooks to better support the use of learners' languages in their studies of additional languages such as English.

Conclusion: Finding a locally appropriate balance

The above discussion suggests that there are strengths and weaknesses in both types of textbook – those produced by local publishers and those produced by multinational publishers. With this in mind, a number of conclusions can be reached concerning how English language textbooks intended for contexts in the global South can be developed in ways that are likely to lead to more (and more appropriate) learning.

Firstly, while global textbooks that are largely unadapted for local contexts are likely to facilitate less learning at primary and secondary levels than textbooks that are adapted, there is evidence of different degrees of success in this endeavor between different multinational publishing houses. For example, EDICEF textbooks

Figure 5. Evidence of adaptation of a global textbook to national context (Grade 10, Ethiopia)

written for contexts in Francophone Africa succeed in adapting images, names and other references to local contexts successfully, also drawing upon French as a more enabled local language to facilitate the learning of English. Perhaps the most successfully adapted of the global textbooks in the sample was a Grade 10 textbook for students in Ethiopia co-published by the Ethiopian MOE and an international publisher (see Figure 5). While the textbook itself appears to have a general orientation to East African contexts – including topics, texts and role models, such as athletes – of relevance to students from such countries, a number of examples were also found of texts that seem to have been specifically chosen for Ethiopian learners. Such localization may have been facilitated through the direct collaboration involved.

Secondly, there is evidence in the sample that both nationally-centralized textbook publishers (e.g., under the direction of the MOE) and a small number of local independent publishers are succeeding in balancing many of the competing factors discussed above to produce textbooks that offer a balance of skills and systems practice, include texts that are neither too long nor too complex (similarly to global textbooks), yet are also able to integrate themes of local relevance (similarly to local textbooks) in ways that may map well onto local teachers' 'sense of plausibility' (see Prabhu, 1990; also Graves, 2021) concerning appropriate pedagogic practice. In this regard, textbooks produced in Djibouti (Figure 4) and Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 6) stood out. Both these textbooks were written by endogenous authorships that included teachers, school inspectors, and pedagogical advisers, and one also included an international consultant.

It is important to conclude this analysis with a recognition of its limitations, including the opportunistic nature of the materials sampled, the fact that analysis was conducted relatively subjectively without the use of rating scales or interrater reliability, and no attempt was made to compare the textbooks themselves with curricular guidelines for the national contexts involved. Nonetheless, there is evidence in this analysis to

Figure 6. Extract from a unit on women's rights in a Grade 8 textbook, Côte d'Ivoire

indicate, firstly, that, through collaboration, it is possible for global TESOL textbooks to be adapted to local contexts (e.g., through the inclusion of local places, people and issues of importance), and that such adaptation can be reasonably expected to lead to more learner engagement, schematic familiarity and learning as a result. There is also evidence here to indicate that locally authored textbooks – which are not constrained by the need to avoid specific subjects considered inappropriate in global textbooks – may also be able to increase relevance to, and engagement of, learners through their choice of texts. Further, at least two examples were found in the sample of locally-produced textbooks that were able to demonstrate evidence of both extensive local knowledge and expertise in textbook-writing within the authorship team — an uncommon combination for reasons discussed earlier in this brief. Nonetheless, future research in this area should aim to shed further light onto this topic, for example, through studies of how different materials are actually used in classrooms in the South, case studies of collaborations between multinational publishing houses and local authorship teams, or through comparative analyses of learner, teacher and curriculum department evaluations of different textbooks implemented in the same curricular contexts.

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