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Social-emotional learning as a framework for foreign language instruction and teacher development

In today's conditions of globalization and instability, particularly in Ukraine, the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) into foreign language teaching is becoming especially relevant. Emotional barriers, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, greatly complicate the process of language learning, which requires effective strategies to overcome them. The purpose of the article is to study the effectiveness of the implementation of SEL in teaching English and to determine the ways of preparing teachers for the integration of SEL in their pedagogical practice. Various research methods were used to achieve this goal, including analysis of international experience, approaches to teacher training, and the results of grant research.

The study covered the analysis of the experience of integrating SEL into the educational process in different countries, as well as approaches to teacher training through trainings, seminars and online courses. The results of a grant study conducted in Ukraine showed a positive impact of SEL on the pedagogical practice of teachers, in particular, on increasing confidence in the use of SEL methods and creating a supportive learning environment. Teachers noted a decrease in students' anxiety and an improvement in their motivation to learn foreign languages.

Based on the obtained results, recommendations were formulated for the further integration of SEL into the educational process, in particular, updating of educational programs, integration of SEL into all aspects of the educational process, and the development of professional communities for the experience exchange. The implementation of SEL in foreign language teaching has the potential to improve students' learning outcomes, reduce emotional barriers, and develop important life skills.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, teacher professional development, teaching and learning foreign languages, educational strategies, development of social skills.

Introduction. Modern education requires students to master foreign languages, but language barriers arising from emotional obstacles, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, can complicate this process (Krashen, 1986). In the conditions of instability caused by military actions in Ukraine, these obstacles become even more tangible (Kyrpa, 2022). Social-emotional learning (SEL) offers effective strategies to overcome these barriers, emphasizing the development of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills, and promotes the development of skills necessary to interact in today's society. For the successful implementation of SEL in foreign language teaching, it is important to ensure adequate teacher training in order to maximize the positive impact of SEL on the educational process and reduce the emotional stress of students.

Aim and tasks. The aim of the article is to study the effectiveness of SEL integration when teaching English and to determine ways for teacher professional training for applying SEL in their pedagogical practice.

Research tasks include:

1) studying the experience of SEL integration into the educational activities, in particular, to help students overcome the language barrier, improving their motivation and effectiveness in learning foreign languages;

2) analysis of approaches to foreign languages teacher training for the SEL integration in their pedagogical practice;

3) presentation and evaluation of the results of the grant research on the training of teachers of secondary education institutions regarding the implementation of SEL in teaching activities;

4) outlining recommendations for further integration of SEL into the educational process and approaches to teacher training.

Methods. Various research methods were used to achieve the aim, including analysis of international experience, approaches to teacher training, and the results of grant research.

Literature review. Having studied the scientific development of recent years, we can say that the issue of SEL integration plays an important role and is studied from different perspectives.

For example, the scientists from Malaysia confirmed that social-emotional skills are an important element of comprehensive human development. Therefore, in addition to academic knowledge, students should be able to recognize, understand and regulate their emotions, as well as build healthy relationships with others. The implementation of SEL in the educational process allows creating a favourable educational environment that contributes to students' harmonious development. In general, the results of the research of the Malaysian scientists emphasize the importance of integrating social-emotional learning into the educational system, which will help students not only achieve high academic results, but also become more stable and confident individuals, able to interact effectively with others and adapt to the challenges of the modern world (Ahmed, Hamzah & Abdullah, 2020).

Aksoy and Gresham (2024) reviewed five evidence-based SEL programs for preschoolers and demonstrated that programs (such as First Step to Success, I Can Problem Solve, Incredible Years, PATHS, and Strong Start Pre-K) effectively improve children's social-emotional skills. The researchers emphasized that these programs often use role-play, stories, puppets, and activities at home, as family involvement and the use of play techniques are important components. It is worth noting that most programs focus on problem-solving skills, including the development of emotional self-regulation, communication skills and self-confidence. The researchers proved that all programs had a positive effect on children's social-emotional skills, reducing problem behaviour and improving social interactions (Aksoy & Gresham, 2024). Kaspar and Massey (2023) studied the implementation of SEL in work with students in elementary school. The researchers point to three key components of successful SEL: positive teacher-student relationships, diversity and acceptance, and student engagement in the learning process. Kaspar and Massey also provide a number of recommendations for implementation, including establishing an SEL team, conducting professional development for teachers, developing SMART-goals and using assessment tools to monitor progress (Kaspar and Massey, 2023: 644-646).

The principles and approaches of SEL are successfully integrated by educators in institutions of secondary education, in particular, when teaching foreign languages, for example, in the USA. Researchers and educators emphasize that the successful integration of SEL into the educational process depends on the creation of a safe and supportive environment where multilingual students can use their language resources and develop their multilingual identity. The scientists also emphasize that it is important to take into account the diverse needs of students and develop strategies to support them (Song, Howard & Olazabal-Arias, 2022).

Pentón Herrera advocates for the adoption of SEL in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as a promising pedagogy for educators (Pentón Herrera, 2020: 3). The scientist states that the primary goal of SEL is to educate students while recognizing that mental and emotional health are essential for their overall wellbeing and success and have an impact on their academic learning (Pentón Herrera, 2020: 11).

The main idea behind promoting SEL in schools is that teachers should use data about student learning to adapt their teaching methods to meet students' needs. Integrating instructional methods, SEL goals, and formative assessment allows for clearer identification of instructional strategies and understanding of instructional goals (Ferreira, Martinsone, & Talić, 2020).

The American researcher Elmi (2020) examines the implementation of SEL in higher education programs and STEM disciplines. Her research shows that SEL not only increases students' interest in science, but also helps them overcome stress and actively engage in the learning process. Educators who apply SEL can support students in developing self-regulation and social awareness, which improves their academic performance. According to the scientist, SEL in higher education helps to create a supportive learning environment that combines cognitive and emotional development of students. It is a long-term investment that contributes not only to academic success, but also to the overall well-being of students (Elmi, 2020).

Among other things, the research emphasizes that teachers play a key role in effective implementation of SEL in schools. Thus, the US scientists (Gimbert, Miller, Herman, Breedlove, & Molina, 2023) emphasize the importance of understanding the socio-emotional competence of educators to improve pedagogical practice and achieve school improvement results.

Results. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2018) emphasizes the important role of education in developing competencies that enable people to participate in an inclusive and sustainable future. Education should prepare students for work and also equip them with the skills to be active, responsible and engaged citizens, which can be achieved integrating SEL approaches into teaching and working with pupils and students.

SEL contributes to the formation of emotional intelligence (EI), the concept of which was introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), encompassing four main abilities: accurately perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate cognitive processes, understanding emotional knowledge, and managing emotions to foster emotional and

intellectual growth. EI also involves essential interpersonal skills such as making and maintaining friendships, cooperative behaviour, academic-related social behaviours, self-management, effective communication, and assertiveness. EI is considered more critical than cognitive intelligence, particularly as many students lack the necessary social-emotional skills. SEL is crucial as it helps individuals effectively manage and express the social and emotional aspects of their lives (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

SEL framework, known to many as the "CASEL wheel," helps cultivate skills and environments that advance students' learning and development. The framework guides the implementation of evidence-based SEL strategies, tailored to local needs, strengths, and cultural contexts. It also supports communities in fostering academic success, civic engagement, health, and career readiness from preschool through adulthood, across diverse settings. CASEL advocates a systemic approach to SEL, integrating it into school curricula and culture, and promoting collaboration with family and community organizations. This approach is designed to enhance educational equity, improve school climates, increase adult SEL competence, and establish meaningful partnerships (CASEL, 2020).

Schonert-Reichl (2017) emphasizes that teachers play a crucial role in driving SEL in schools, with their own social-emotional competence and wellbeing significantly impacting student outcomes. Positive teacher-student relationships foster better learning and emotional development, whereas teachers struggling with the emotional demands of their role can negatively affect student achievement and behaviour. Understanding and supporting teachers' social-emotional health is vital for enhancing SEL in classrooms (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

SEL offers approaches that help students better understand and manage their emotions, increasing their self-esteem and openness to language learning. SEL is aimed at developing EI, which helps students better understand and manage their emotions. For example, self-regulation exercises can teach adolescents to recognize their emotional states before a language task and use an anxiety-reduction technique, which improves their ability to learn language.

Effective SEL methods, such as role-playing, group discussions and empathy exercises, mediation and conflict resolution sessions, create a supportive learning environment, can stimulate language immersion and reduce the emotional discomfort associated with learning a new language. Such approaches promote greater openness among students, reduce the fear of making mistakes, and allow students to freely experiment with the language. Teachers, who apply SEL principles, using empathy and empathic listening, can help students overcome fears and build confidence in their own language abilities by creating a safe and supportive learning environment where adolescents feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and mistakes, which is inherent part of the learning process.

The practical implementation of SEL in foreign language learning can include various activities aimed at the development of social and emotional skills. For example, using cooperative learning allows students to work in groups where they can practice language skills in a less stressful environment. Interactive exercises, such as keeping language diaries or creating video projects, can also promote deeper immersion in the language and culture, reducing anxiety and increasing motivation.

Using social-emotional games and exercises helps pupils develop language skills in an interactive way. This improves their communication skills and strengthens interpersonal ties with peers, which contributes to better social integration. A teacher who applies SEL becomes a mentor who contributes to the formation of a positive attitude to learning.

Intercultural competence is an important aspect of learning any language, especially in the context of globalization. SEL can contribute to the development of openness, empathy and respect for other cultures. Through its emphasis on social awareness and EI, SEL helps students better perceive and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, increasing the effectiveness of intercultural communication.

By leveraging motivation, self-confidence, and reducing anxiety, teachers can create welcoming and inclusive environments. By examining various stages of a lesson and incorporating techniques such as relating to learners, encouraging risk-taking, and focusing on practical activities, educators can facilitate effective learning in challenging environments. Providing choice, voice, and relevance can enhance motivation while fostering a sense of belonging and respect enhances self-confidence. Embracing errors as part of the learning process, adopting a growth mindset, and utilizing positive nonverbal communication can help alleviate anxiety (Kyrpa, 2023).

In order to prepare English language teachers of secondary education institutions of Dnipropetrovsk region (Ukraine) to implement SEL approaches in teaching activities, a study was conducted within the framework of the research topic "Personality in the educational environment of modern society" ("UkrINTEI", registration number: 0123U104510, certificate № 03 dated January 05, 2024) and implemented with the grant support of the House of Europe (grant agreement No. 42466-IPG-EDU). 22 English language teachers from five communities (Slobozhanske, Pidhorodnenske, Novomoskovsk, Petropavlivka, and Tsarychanska) who work in primary and secondary schools were invited to participate in the pilot implementation of the study.

Within the framework of the research, we developed an educational program, held trainings, mentoring for teachers, and an international online conference (State registration at the Ministry of Education and Culture and Science "UkrINTEI", certificate № 248 dated April 08, 2024).

The trainings covered key aspects of SEL, such as developing EI, stress management, and techniques for maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere. The training program included both theoretical classes and practical exercises, which allowed the participants to directly apply the acquired knowledge.

Mentoring was provided by experienced specialists who supported teachers in implementing new methods in their daily practice. Mentors held regular consultations, helped to solve the problems that arose, and provided feedback on the results of the implementation of SEL in the classroom.

The evaluation of the research results showed a positive impact on the pedagogical practice of teachers. After completing the entire training cycle, teachers noted an increase in their own confidence in the application of SEL methods, and demonstrated the ability to create a more supportive and positive learning environment, which contributed to reducing the level of anxiety and stress among students.

Among other things, teachers noted an improvement of students' motivation to learn foreign languages and their academic results, which became possible due to the use of SEL methods.

The obtained data give us the opportunity to form a number of recommendations regarding SEL integration into teaching activities (the list is not exhaustive and may be expanded or adapted):

1) periodic updating of training programs taking into account new research and changes in the field of SEL to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of training;

2) SEL integration in all aspects of the educational process to ensure a deeper impact on the development of students;

3) formation of professional communities to share experiences and support teachers in the implementation of SEL, which may include regular meetings and online platforms for discussion and sharing of resources;

4) development and implementation of more diverse training formats, including simulations of real classroom situations and active learning methods for better assimilation of the material;

5) introduction of ongoing mentoring and support programs for teachers to provide them with the opportunity to receive help and feedback in the process of implementing SEL;

6) regular evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher training based on the received data to improve results.

Conclusions. Social emotional learning (SEL) has become a popular term in recent years. It helps people acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand and control emotions. Using a SEL approach, teachers can help students achieve positive goals and teach them to empathize with others, which helps build healthy relationships and make responsible decisions. SEL promotes cognitive development skills, increases student attention and motivation, improves student-teacher relationships, and increases student confidence and achievement.

SEL is also closely related to concepts such as emotional intelligence, mindfulness and mediation, which have found their place in modern approaches to language teaching.

The article presents the experience of scientists and educators regarding the integration of SEL into educational activities, analysed approaches to the training of foreign language teachers, presented the results of a grant study on the training of teachers of general secondary education institutions regarding the introduction of SEL into teaching activities, formulated recommendations for the further integration of SEL into the educational process and optimization of approaches to teacher training.

The article also emphasizes that implementing SEL will not diminish the importance of academic subjects, but on the contrary, may enhance them. SEL has the potential to strengthen language skills and to address many of the social and emotional challenges that pupils face when learning foreign languages. The integration of SEL into the process of teaching foreign languages opens up new horizons for teenagers, helping them to overcome language barriers and to develop important life skills. SEL provides students with the necessary tools for effective communication and interaction in a multicultural world by creating a supportive, open and emotionally safe learning environment where every student can realize their potential. The integration of SEL into standard teaching programs can be a significant contribution to the formation of a comprehensively developed and open personality. SEL plays a crucial role in addressing educational inequities by fostering inclusive environment and challenging discriminatory practices, supporting the overall social, emotional, and academic growth of students within diverse educational systems.

Thus, teachers need to know how to incorporate SEL into their teaching, recognizing its critical role alongside academic learning, which can greatly support their students in meeting today's challenges and achieving success.

The use of school-based interventions, the development of teacher capacity, and the integration of the approach into policy at all levels are critical to promoting SEL in the educational process.

Regarding the prospects for further exploration, we consider it necessary:

1) to investigate how SEL affects the long-term development of students, in particular, their social integration, career success and personal growth;

2) examine how SEL will affect students of different ages and at different stages of their learning, as well as how to adapt SEL approaches for different age groups;

3) analyse how cultural characteristics affect the implementation of SEL in different countries and regions, as well as how to adapt SEL programs to work with cultural diversity;

4) examine how the integration of SEL affects pedagogical strategies, teaching methods and classroom management, as well as overall teaching effectiveness.

Соціально-емоційне навчання як основа
для викладання іноземної мови та розвитку вчителя

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У сучасних умовах глобалізації та нестабільності, зокрема в Україні, інтеграція соціально-емоційного навчання (СЕН) у викладання іноземних мов набуває особливої актуальності. Емоційні перешкоди, як-от тривога і страх помилки, значно ускладнюють процес навчання мов, що потребує ефективних стратегій для їх подолання. Метою статті є дослідження ефективності впровадження СЕН у викладання англійської мови та визначення шляхів підготовки вчителів до інтеграції СЕН в їхню педагогічну практику. Для досягнення цієї мети застосовувалися різноманітні методи дослідження, зокрема аналіз міжнародного досвіду, підходів до підготовки вчителів і результати грантового дослідження.

Дослідження охопило аналіз досвіду інтеграції СЕН в освітній процес у різних країнах, а також підходи до підготовки вчителів через тренінги, семінари та онлайн-курси. Результати грантового дослідження, проведеного в Україні, показали позитивний вплив СЕН на педагогічну практику вчителів, зокрема на підвищення впевненості у використанні СЕН-методів та створення підтримувального освітнього середовища. Вчителі відзначили зниження рівня тривоги в учнів та покращення їх мотивації до вивчення іноземних мов.

На основі отриманих результатів сформульовано рекомендації щодо подальшої інтеграції СЕН в освітній процес, зокрема періодичне оновлення навчальних програм, інтеграція СЕН у всі аспекти освітнього процесу та розвиток професійних спільнот для обміну досвідом. Упровадження СЕН у викладання іноземних мов має потенціал для покращення навчальних результатів, зменшення емоційних бар'єрів та розвитку важливих життєвих навичок в учнів.

Ключові слова: соціально-емоційне навчання, професійний розвиток учителів, навчання іноземних мов, стратегії навчання та виховання, розвиток соціальних навичок.

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