



Implementing a Caring Environment Through Social Emotional Learning (Sel) Course for Student with Diverse Ability at Bilingual School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-06-02 Revised: 2026-06-12 Accepted: 2026-06-27 Keywords: <i>Social Emotional Learning (SEL); Caring learning environment; Students with diverse abilities; Bilingual school; English language education</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.12132 Corresponding Author: Hidayatut Thomaroh hidayatut030422261@uinsu.ac.id Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara	<i>The shift toward holistic education has drawn increasing attention to students' social and emotional well-being alongside academic achievement, particularly for students with diverse abilities learning in a second language. This study examines how the implementation of a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course contributes to creating a caring learning environment for students with diverse abilities at a bilingual school in North Sumatra, focusing on the benefits of the course for students and how teachers support its implementation. A qualitative design was employed, involving two female SEL teachers selected through purposive sampling based on their direct responsibility for teaching the course. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and analyzed using the qualitative descriptive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with trustworthiness established through credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability. The findings show that the SEL course fostered students' emotional regulation and social openness, increased confidence in English communication, illustrated by a documented case of a previously hesitant student, and cultivated emotional expression and language development as interconnected outcomes. Teacher support was reflected in dedicated SEL time and voluntary routines, instructional strategies integrating language practice, differentiated approaches for students with diverse abilities, responsiveness to emotional needs, and advocacy for further institutional training. Interpreted through Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Noddings' concept of the caring relation, these findings suggest that a caring environment emerges when teachers consistently treat students' emotional and linguistic needs as interconnected. The study is limited to two teachers in a single bilingual school and relies solely on self-reported data; future research involving multiple schools and student voices is recommended.</i>

1. Introduction

The idea of effective education has changed in recent years from emphasizing only academic success to embracing a more comprehensive view of students' growth. These days, effective education extends beyond academic achievement and encompasses students' social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing. Schools play a pivotal role in creating environments where students can learn, grow, and flourish across multiple dimensions, including academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development (Frazier & Doyle Fosco, 2024).

Contemporary education has shifted from a narrow focus on academic achievement toward a more holistic approach that values students' social and emotional development. Research by the OECD (2024) indicates that social and emotional skills are associated with better academic performance, psychological well-being, and resilience, highlighting the importance of creating supportive learning environments that foster students' overall development.

Social and emotional learning interventions promote students' social-emotional competencies, positive attitudes, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement. Furthermore, stronger social and emotional competencies are associated with higher levels of well-being, highlighting the importance of creating supportive and caring learning environments for all students (Taylor et al., 2017). A caring and supportive learning environment is essential because feelings of security, enjoyment, and competence may exert a stronger influence on children's development than cognitive factors alone (Lewis & Michalson, 1983).

Beyond instructional strategies, the quality of the learning environment also plays a significant role in supporting students' academic and personal development. Learning environments that provide continuous opportunities for peer collaboration, authentic interaction, and consistent support encourage students to become more confident, socially engaged, and responsible learners (Walidin et al., 2026). These findings indicate that effective learning is not solely determined by academic instruction but also by the presence of a caring environment that nurtures students' emotional well-being and positive relationships.

In educational settings, teachers play a crucial role in creating supportive learning environments that accommodate students' diverse backgrounds and developmental needs. Previous studies have shown that effective teaching requires educators to adopt patient, flexible, and creative instructional approaches because students often demonstrate differences in motivation, emotional readiness, language acquisition, and learning development. These variations become even more significant in classrooms consisting of students with diverse abilities, where emotional support and individualized teaching strategies are essential to encourage active participation and meaningful learning experiences (Irham et al., 2023).

According to Purnomo (2017), language is not merely a means of communication but also a powerful force that influences and shapes human actions and social realities. Students who are learning a second language frequently experience additional emotional strain because they must connect socially, communicate, and express ideas in a language in which they may not yet feel comfortable. Such demands may exacerbate feelings of dissatisfaction, insecurity, and reluctance to engage in class activities for students with a range of abilities. Language should not merely be viewed as a means of communication; it also functions as a driving force in shaping human actions and social practices (Purnomo et al., 2025).

Consequently, emotional and social support becomes essential in ensuring meaningful engagement in bilingual English education. English language learning provides opportunities for students to develop intercultural understanding by exposing them to diverse cultural perspectives. Integrating cultural content into English learning helps students appreciate cultural diversity, respect differences, and apply language meaningfully in real-life social contexts (Purnomo et al., 2023).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) provides a structured framework for addressing these needs. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020), SEL is the process through which individuals acquire and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, establish positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, and make responsible decisions. These competencies contribute directly to the formation of a caring learning environment by fostering emotional regulation, trust, and constructive social interaction.

The integration of SEL within English education has received growing scholarly attention. A study conducted by Wicaksono and Saraswati (2024) revealed that SEL-oriented practices in ELT enhance students' motivation, self-confidence, and peer relationships, while reducing language anxiety. Their findings suggest that SEL supports the creation of a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere. However, their study primarily focused on identifying opportunities and challenges in integrating SEL into ELT rather than examining its structured implementation for specific student populations.

Similarly, research by Sania et al. (2025) analyzed the implementation of SEL for students with special needs in inclusive schools through a literature review approach. The findings indicated that many students with special needs still do not receive adequate SEL intervention. Although the study emphasized the importance of SEL in inclusive education, it did not explore its application within bilingual English-learning contexts nor examine the impact of a structured SEL course on classroom climate.

Another relevant study conducted by Allahyarova (2025) examined the role of social and emotional learning in language education using an experimental quantitative method. The study demonstrated that integrating interactive learning media had a positive effect on students' academic achievement and engagement. Nevertheless, the focus was centered on instructional media effectiveness rather than on systematically designing a dedicated SEL course to cultivate a caring learning environment. Building on these findings, Maharani and Purnomo (2026) investigated the use of Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) to foster social inclusion in an inclusive English classroom. The study demonstrated that structured peer interaction and collaborative support improved students' confidence, independence, and social participation. However, the research concentrated on peer-mediated instructional strategies rather than the implementation of a structured Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course in bilingual school settings.

Although previous studies have acknowledged the benefits of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in education, important gaps remain. Existing studies have demonstrated the significance of supportive learning environments, teacher preparedness, and positive peer interactions in enhancing students' learning experiences and personal development (Sahnan et al., 2025; Walidin et al., 2026). However, these studies do not specifically examine how a structured Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course contributes to establishing a caring learning environment for students with diverse abilities in bilingual school settings.

Most previous research has focused on SEL conceptually, evaluated instructional media, explored technology integration, or discussed learning practices in general educational contexts. Consequently, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how a structured SEL course fosters caring classroom environments while simultaneously

addressing the social-emotional and learning needs of students with diverse abilities in bilingual English education.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how the implementation of a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course contributes to creating a caring learning environment for students with diverse abilities at a bilingual school. By focusing on the structured integration of SEL within English education, this research seeks to provide deeper insight into the relationship between emotional development and language learning engagement. The study is expected to offer practical guidance for educators in designing inclusive, emotionally responsive, and supportive classroom environments that accommodate student diversity while promoting meaningful participation in English learning. Based on the background and the limitation of the problem, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What are the benefits of the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course for students in a bilingual school setting?
2. How do teachers support the implementation of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in a bilingual school setting?

Theoretical Review

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to an educational approach that emphasizes the development of students' emotional, social, and behavioral competencies alongside academic learning. SEL enables learners to recognize and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, and make responsible decisions in both academic and social contexts. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), SEL is structured around five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

In educational settings, SEL is widely regarded as a fundamental component of effective teaching and learning. Emotional competence allows students to regulate stress, remain motivated, and engage meaningfully in classroom activities. Maurice J. Elias et al. (2015) explain that students who receive systematic SEL instruction tend to show improved emotional regulation, positive social behavior, and stronger academic engagement. This suggests that SEL plays a crucial role in shaping students' readiness to learn and their ability to cope with academic challenges.

Furthermore, Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) emphasize that SEL contributes to deeper learning by creating emotionally supportive classroom environments. When students feel safe, respected, and valued, they are more likely to participate actively and persist in learning tasks. Therefore, SEL should be viewed not as an additional program, but as an essential framework that supports students' holistic development and long-term educational success.

Social Emotional Learning in English Language Education

Teaching English language learning involves complex cognitive processes that are closely linked to emotional and social factors. Learners are expected to communicate ideas, express opinions, and interact with peers using a second or foreign language, which often creates feelings of anxiety and insecurity. According to H. Douglas Brown (2014), affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-esteem significantly influence the success of second language acquisition.

In bilingual school contexts, these affective challenges may be intensified due to higher academic expectations and increased exposure to English as a medium of instruction. Zoltán Dörnyei (2020) argues that positive emotional experiences and

supportive classroom interactions enhance learners' willingness to communicate and participate in language learning. When students feel emotionally supported, they are more confident in using English and less fearful of making mistakes.

The integration of SEL into English education provides a structured way to address emotional barriers in language learning. By fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy, SEL helps students manage language anxiety and build confidence. As a result, SEL contributes to a more supportive English learning environment where students are encouraged to engage actively and develop their communicative competence.

Students with Diverse Abilities in Bilingual School Contexts

Students with diverse abilities include learners who differ in cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, learning styles, and social interaction skills. In bilingual schools, these differences may become more visible due to the dual demands of content learning and second language use. According to the UNESCO (2021), inclusive education requires schools to address learners' academic, emotional, and social needs to ensure equitable learning opportunities.

Students with diverse abilities often experience emotional challenges such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and difficulty participating in classroom interactions. These challenges may limit their engagement in English learning activities, particularly in communicative tasks that require active participation. Without adequate emotional support, inclusive practices in bilingual schools may remain superficial and less effective.

SEL offers a framework for supporting students with diverse abilities by promoting emotional resilience, empathy, and positive social relationships. Through systematic SEL instruction, students are better equipped to manage emotional difficulties and interact constructively with peers. Consequently, SEL plays an important role in enhancing inclusion and participation in bilingual English classrooms.

Caring Learning Environment

A caring learning environment is characterized by emotional safety, mutual respect, empathy, and supportive relationships between teachers and students. Such an environment allows learners to feel accepted and valued, which is essential for meaningful learning. Nel Noddings (2013) emphasizes that caring relationships in education form the foundation of students' emotional and moral development.

In English classrooms, a caring learning environment is particularly important because language learning requires students to take risks, such as speaking in front of others and making mistakes. When students feel emotionally safe, they are more willing to participate and express themselves in English. According to the Learning Policy Institute (2020), schools that integrate SEL into classroom practices demonstrate improved school climate, stronger student engagement, and more positive peer interactions.

For students with diverse abilities, a caring learning environment helps reduce emotional stress and promotes inclusion. Teachers who apply SEL principles can create classrooms where differences are respected and emotional needs are acknowledged. As a result, students are more likely to develop confidence and actively engage in bilingual learning activities.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Course

A Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course is a structured instructional program designed to explicitly develop students' emotional and social competencies. Unlike informal SEL practices, an SEL course includes clear objectives, planned activities, and reflective processes that support students' emotional growth. According to the OECD (2021),

structured SEL programs are more effective in promoting emotional well-being and academic success than unstructured approaches.

In bilingual schools, an SEL course provides systematic support for students' emotional development within English learning contexts. This structured approach is particularly beneficial for students with diverse abilities, as it offers consistent guidance and opportunities to practice emotional regulation and social interaction. Through an SEL course, students learn to manage emotions, build positive relationships, and participate more confidently in English classrooms.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course in creating a caring learning environment for students with diverse abilities in a bilingual school. Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena by examining participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations within their natural settings. Through this approach, the researcher is able to gain deeper insights into how teachers perceive, apply, and reflect on SEL practices in English classrooms. According to Sugiyono (2010), qualitative research is conducted in natural contexts where the researcher acts as the main instrument, and the data are presented in the form of words, explanations, and descriptions rather than numbers. This approach is appropriate for the present study because its primary objective is to understand teachers' experiences and viewpoints regarding the implementation of SEL rather than to measure outcomes through statistical analysis.

The research is conducted in a bilingual school located in North Sumatra, where English serves as the primary medium of instruction. The participants are two female teachers who teach the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course using English as the language of instruction. They are selected through purposive sampling, a technique in which participants are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Sugiyono, 2010). The selection criteria include being a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) teacher in a bilingual school, having experience teaching students with diverse abilities, being familiar with and implementing SEL practices in the classroom, and being responsible for teaching the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course.

One participant has two years of teaching experience, while the other has six years of teaching experience. These teachers were selected because they are the only teachers responsible for teaching the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) course in the school. Their direct involvement in planning and delivering the course provides them with in-depth knowledge and practical experience regarding the implementation of SEL, its benefits for students, and the strategies used to support students' social and emotional development in a bilingual learning environment.

The primary instrument used in this study is an open-ended questionnaire designed to collect detailed information about teachers' understanding, experiences, and perceptions regarding the implementation of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in English classrooms. The data collected consist of qualitative data in the form of written responses, opinions, explanations, and reflections from the participants.

These data focus on teachers' perspectives concerning SEL implementation, classroom climate, emotional support, and inclusive practices for students with diverse abilities. Creswell (2018) states that open-ended questionnaires are suitable for qualitative research because they allow participants to express their views freely and provide detailed information based on their experiences.

The questionnaire addresses several aspects, including teachers' understanding of SEL, the implementation of SEL in English classrooms, emotional and social challenges experienced by students with diverse abilities, the role of SEL in creating a caring learning environment, and teachers' perceptions of structured SEL courses.

Data are collected by distributing the open-ended questionnaire to the selected English teachers in the bilingual school. Depending on the participants' preferences, the questionnaire is administered either in printed form or through an online platform. The data collection process begins with obtaining permission from the school and informing participants about the purpose of the study. Clear instructions are then provided to ensure participants understand how to complete the questionnaire. They are given sufficient time to answer the questions carefully and honestly.

Once completed, all responses are collected and compiled for analysis. According to Sugiyono (2010), questionnaires are effective instruments for gathering data related to participants' perceptions, experiences, and opinions. Throughout the research process, confidentiality and ethical considerations are maintained to ensure that participants feel comfortable providing honest and meaningful responses.

The data obtained from the questionnaire are analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The analysis follows the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, the researcher carefully reviews all responses and selects information relevant to SEL, caring learning environments, and students with diverse abilities. In the data display stage, the information is organized into thematic categories or tables to facilitate interpretation. Finally, the researcher draws conclusions and verifies findings based on recurring themes and patterns identified in the data. Coding and thematic grouping are employed to identify patterns related to emotional support, classroom climate, and inclusive practices in English learning. The findings are then interpreted to address the objectives of the study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies the criteria proposed by Creswell (2018), namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, each of which is operationalized concretely for the two participating teachers in this study. Credibility is achieved by using open-ended questions that encourage the two teachers to provide detailed and honest responses, and is further strengthened through member checking, in which a summary of the interpreted responses from each teacher is shared back with that teacher to confirm that the researcher's interpretation accurately reflects her intended meaning. Dependability is ensured through clear documentation of the research procedures and data collection processes, including the questionnaire distribution, completion, and coding steps, so that the analytical process applied consistently to both teachers' responses can be traced and audited.

Confirmability is maintained by grounding interpretations and conclusions in the actual responses provided by the two teachers rather than the researcher's assumptions, and by cross-checking emerging themes against both teachers' raw answers to ensure that the conclusions are not shaped solely by one teacher's responses. Transferability is supported by presenting detailed descriptions of the research context, the two teachers' backgrounds (teaching experience, educational qualification, and length of service in the bilingual school), and the data collection procedures, as well as by comparing the similarities and differences between the two teachers' responses, enabling readers to judge the extent to which the findings may apply to other, similar bilingual school settings.

3. Result

Following the data reduction and display procedures outlined in the Methodology, participant responses were organized into thematic categories corresponding to the study's two research questions. Each theme presented below reflects a pattern that emerged consistently across, or was clearly evidenced within, the two participants' accounts, and is supported by direct excerpts from their questionnaire responses. Data from both homeroom teachers were synthesized rather than treated as separate case narratives, allowing convergences and divergences between the two classrooms to surface directly within each theme.

A. Benefits of the SEL Course for Students in a Bilingual School Setting

1. *Growth in Emotional Regulation and Social Openness*

Both participants described students becoming better able to manage and express their emotions because of regular engagement in SEL activities. Teacher 2 observed that after consistently participating in the *meet up and buddy up* routine, students "*can managed their emotion more easily,*" and described her classroom atmosphere as "*Cheerful,*" where students "*can express our opinion and how our feelings openly.*" Teacher 1's account points in a similar direction: her ongoing attention to "*how they manage emotions and solve problems*" during daily interaction, and her observation that SEL-based activities were associated with increased "*teamwork,*" both describe outcomes she attributes to sustained SEL engagement rather than one-off events. These are teachers' interpretive observations rather than directly measured outcomes, and Teacher 2's contributions on this theme were considerably briefer than Teacher 1's, so the finding leans somewhat more heavily on Teacher 1's account than the parallel phrasing above might suggest.

2. *Increased Confidence in English Communication*

The most concrete and individually traceable benefit in the data is increased student confidence in speaking English, particularly among students who had previously avoided verbal participation. Teacher 1 provided the only fully narrated individual case in the dataset: a student who was initially "*very quiet and hesitant to speak English*" became "*more confident, participated more actively, and collaborated better with peers*" following sustained SEL support and small-group rehearsal opportunities. Because this account describes a trajectory of change in a specific student rather than a general impression, it carries more evidentiary weight than the more interpretive claims discussed elsewhere in these findings.

3. *Dual Benefit: Social-Emotional Growth Alongside Language Acquisition*

Because the SEL course is delivered in English, the benefits reported above appear structurally linked to students' language development, based on how teachers described their activity design. Teacher 1 described using "*role plays, pair discussions, and sharing feelings using simple English vocabulary*" as activities intended to build emotional vocabulary and communicative competence together. A parallel structure is evident in Teacher 2's *meet up and buddy up* sessions, conducted in English but centered on emotional disclosure rather than grammatical correctness. Read together, both teachers' activity designs suggest an arrangement in which linguistic confidence is intended to accrue as a by-product of emotional expression, rather than being pursued as a separate academic target, though the data reflect teachers' design intentions and observations rather than independent verification of this dual effect.

B. Teacher Support for the Implementation of SEL in a Bilingual School Setting

1. Allocating Dedicated Time and Routines for SEL

Both teachers supported SEL delivery through consistent time allocation, though the source of that time differed. Teacher 2 noted that her class holds *"1 LH in a week for SEL Program,"* a scheduled slot that reflects the school's broader curricular structure, in addition to the daily *"Meet up & Buddy up"* routine, which she runs at her own initiative. Teacher 1's contribution was entirely self-initiated: beginning lessons with *"a brief emotional check-in"* and closing with *"a short reflection"* and recognition of *"positive behavior and teamwork."* Distinguishing between the scheduled course slot and these teacher-initiated routines matters, because it shows that teacher support for SEL extended beyond simply following the timetable; both teachers built additional, voluntary structure into their daily practice.

2. Applying Instructional Strategies That Integrate English Language Practice

Teachers supported implementation by deliberately selecting activities that fused emotional content with language practice. Teacher 1 emphasized a focus on *"self-awareness and relationship skills"* delivered through paired discussion and role-play, while Teacher 2 described a broader approach, *"we focus in all skill equally,"* suggesting she did not prioritize particular SEL competencies over others. This divergence indicates meaningful professional autonomy in how the two teachers translated a shared SEL curriculum into daily practice.

3. Differentiating Instruction for Students with Diverse Abilities

Support for students with diverse abilities was visible in adapted instructional strategies. Teacher 1 described using *"visual supports, interactive activities, and flexible learning strategies"* and committed to ensuring *"every student has equal opportunities to participate."* Teacher 2 pursued a comparable goal through *"differentiate instruction"* and by *"threw[ing] some engaging questions"* at more reserved students. Both teachers also independently described giving students thinking time and small-group rehearsal before whole-class speaking tasks, a specific procedural strategy that appears in both accounts almost identically, making it one of the more strongly corroborated findings in this study.

4. Responding to Student Needs: From Routine Correction to Emotional Crisis

Teacher support extended across a spectrum of responsiveness, from routine linguistic correction to active management of emotional distress, and both teachers monitored these needs through direct observation rather than formal assessment tools. Teacher 1 described a measured response to language mistakes, framing them as *"valuable opportunities to learn and grow"* and choosing to *"praise students for their effort rather than just their results,"* while tracking progress by *"observ[ing] students' behavior during class, their interactions with peers, and how they manage emotions and solve problems."* Teacher 2 described a considerably more emotionally charged scenario, a student who *"went to furious until crying,"* which she managed by combining reassurance with gentle correction: *"appreciated them and tell them the correct words and encouraged them to try again."* This contrast indicates that supporting SEL implementation was not an equivalent demand across the two classrooms; one teacher's account centers on routine encouragement, while the other's includes active de-escalation of emotional crisis.

5. Advocating for Institutional Support as a Form of Sustained Commitment

Beyond direct classroom practice, both teachers supported the implementation of SEL by actively identifying what the program needs to remain effective over time, rather than treating their current practice as sufficient on its

own. Teacher 1 recommended *"regular SEL training, encouraging collaboration among teachers,"* and separately advised incoming teachers to *"start with simple practices such as building positive relationships, listening to students, and creating a safe learning environment,"* focusing on *"each student's growth, not only academic achievement."* Teacher 2's parallel recommendation was considerably more compact: *"more SEL workshop for teachers."* This form of support differs in kind from Themes B.1 through B.4: rather than a classroom action, it is a form of professional advocacy, teachers using their accumulated experience to flag where institutional investment has not yet caught up with institutional adoption of the SEL course. Read against Theme B.1, where SEL is shown to be formally scheduled and embedded in the timetable, this finding suggests that the school has institutionalized the time and space for SEL more thoroughly than it has institutionalized teacher preparation for delivering it, and that both teachers are, in effect, pushing for that gap to close.

4. Discussion

The pattern of improved emotional regulation and social openness described in Theme A.1, together with the individually-narrated gain in speaking confidence in Theme A.2, is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which holds that anxiety, low self-confidence, and inhibition raise a psychological barrier that blocks language input and production, while low anxiety and higher self-confidence allow language use to proceed more freely (Krashen, 1982, 1985). The classroom conditions both teachers described, structured emotional check-ins, praise for effort rather than accuracy, and small-group rehearsal before whole-class speaking, correspond closely to the conditions Krashen identified as necessary for lowering this affective barrier.

This offers a plausible explanation for the case in Theme A.2: the shift from a "very quiet and hesitant" student to one who "participated more actively" may reflect not only accumulated language exposure but a sustained reduction in the emotional barrier to speaking. This interpretation should be treated as consistent with Krashen's theory rather than confirmed by it, since the data reflect teachers' retrospective perceptions of student confidence rather than a direct psycholinguistic measure of anxiety.

The dual benefit identified in Theme A.3, where emotional expression and English practice occurred as a single activity rather than two competing demands, extends the same affective-filter logic further than Krashen's original hypothesis, which primarily concerns the removal of a barrier to input rather than the deliberate fusion of emotional and linguistic output. What both teachers described, role-play and paired sharing on one side, English-medium *meet up and buddy up* sessions on the other, suggests a structure in which the object of evaluation was emotional content, not grammatical accuracy. Given that Krashen specifically identifies second-language speaking as uniquely prone to embarrassment compared to other academic tasks (Krashen, 1982), restructuring the evaluative focus away from accuracy may be one mechanism through which this risk was managed in both classrooms. This remains an interpretation of teachers' reported design choices rather than an independently verified linguistic outcome.

The distinction drawn in Theme B.1, between the school-scheduled weekly SEL slot and the additional routines each teacher built voluntarily into daily practice, echoes a broader point in SEL implementation literature: schoolwide adoption of a program and the depth of its classroom-level delivery are not the same thing, and the latter depends heavily on individual teachers' initiative layered on top of institutional scheduling (CASEL, 2013). That both teachers independently added structure beyond the mandated slot, emotional check-ins, reflection time, is notable precisely because it was not required by the timetable

itself; it suggests that institutional time created the opportunity for SEL, but the depth of its implementation in these two classrooms was substantially shaped by teacher agency.

The strategies described in Theme B.3, visual supports, engaging prompts for reticent students, and small-group rehearsal before public speaking, correspond closely to core practices in Tomlinson's model of differentiated instruction, which frames adjusting content, process, and product to learner readiness as a default response to classroom diversity rather than a remedial exception (Tomlinson, 2014, 2017).

This framing helps explain why Theme B.3 and the benefits described in Theme A overlap so closely: differentiation theory predicts that responsive, need-based instruction should produce visible gains precisely because it does not apply uniform treatment to non-uniform learners (Tomlinson, 2017). The near-identical procedural detail both teachers offered here, independently describing the same rehearsal-before-performance strategy, also suggests this may be one of the more transferable elements of practice identified in this study, though this remains a claim about two teachers' practices, not a generalizable instructional model.

The contrast in Theme B.4, between Teacher 1's routine, low-stakes correction of language errors and Teacher 2's active de-escalation of a student in emotional crisis, indicates that the demands of "supporting SEL implementation" were not equivalent across these two classrooms. This divergence is relevant to how the school might interpret teachers' request for training in Theme B.5: a generic SEL training format risks addressing only the lower-intensity end of this spectrum, routine encouragement, while leaving teachers underprepared for the higher-intensity end, active emotional crisis management, that at least one participant described experiencing directly.

The finding in Theme B.5, that both teachers advocated for more structured training despite already sustaining considerable day-to-day practice, mirrors a caution raised directly in SEL implementation research: training is identified as a distinct enabling condition for implementation quality, separate from curriculum adoption itself, and teachers who receive structured initial training are more likely to deliver a program's intended content in full (CASEL, 2013). Recent implementation research further reports that time constraints and insufficient specialized training are among the most commonly cited barriers to effective SEL delivery, even among teachers otherwise committed to the program (Zakiyyah & Sutopo, 2026).

Read against this literature, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2's recommendations are not simply a personal wish list; they echo a broader, documented pattern in which schools institutionalize SEL as policy more readily than they institutionalize the preparation of the staff who deliver it. Whether this reflects a resource constraint specific to this school, an early stage of program rollout, or a wider pattern in SEL adoption cannot be determined from two participants, and would require input from school leadership to resolve.

Considered together, the practices described across both research questions, structured emotional check-ins, non-punitive responses to error, differentiated participation strategies, and responsive handling of emotional distress, resemble what Noddings describes as the caring relation in teaching: an orientation in which the teacher attends to the expressed and inferred needs of the student and responds to them as ends in themselves, not solely as instruments toward academic outcomes (Noddings, 2012). Noddings argues that a central task of teaching is to connect the moral and emotional life of the classroom with the student's wider needs (Noddings, 2012, p. 779), which corresponds closely to how both teachers in this study described their handling of mistakes, distress, and reticent students, as relational moments requiring attentiveness rather than purely instructional problems requiring correction.

This suggests that the caring environment named in this study's title is not a separate construct running alongside SEL implementation, but the relational quality that both research questions converge on from different angles: RQ1 describes this care from the student's side, as felt benefit, and RQ2 describes it from the teacher's side, as enacted practice.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that the SEL course contributed to a caring learning environment in two closely linked ways. From the students' side, teachers reported gains in emotional regulation and social openness, a documented case of a hesitant student developing confidence in speaking English, and a course design in which emotional expression and English communication were cultivated together rather than as separate goals. From the teachers' side, this caring environment was actively built rather than simply scheduled: both teachers added voluntary routines, such as emotional check-ins and closing reflections, beyond the mandated SEL slot; adapted their instructional strategies, including visual supports, thinking time, and small-group rehearsal, to accommodate students with diverse abilities; responded to a spectrum of needs ranging from routine language correction to active emotional crisis management; and advocated for further institutional training.

Read through Noddings' concept of the caring relation, these practices suggest that a caring environment is not a separate add-on to SEL implementation but the relational quality that emerges when teachers consistently treat students' emotional and linguistic needs as interconnected. For teachers, particularly those working in bilingual or English-medium classrooms with students of varying abilities, the practical implication is that a caring environment can be cultivated through concrete, low-cost routines, brief emotional check-ins, effort-focused feedback, rehearsal time before public speaking, and differentiated prompts, rather than requiring an entirely separate curriculum, provided teachers are also given adequate training to handle the more emotionally intense situations that may arise.

This study nonetheless has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. It was conducted in a single bilingual school and relied on the perspectives of only two SEL teachers, so the findings reflect the practices and experiences of these two classrooms rather than a pattern that can be generalized across bilingual schools more broadly. The data were also collected solely through an open-ended questionnaire, which captures teachers' self-reported perceptions but does not include direct classroom observation or students' own voices, so the reported benefits for students could not be independently verified.

In addition, one participant's responses were considerably briefer than the others on several themes, meaning some findings relied more heavily on a single teacher's account and limiting how evenly the two perspectives could be compared. Future research could address these limitations by involving multiple schools and a larger number of teachers to test the transferability of these findings, incorporating classroom observation or student interviews to triangulate teachers' reported perceptions, and examining SEL implementation over a longer period to capture how these practices and their institutional support evolve over time.

6. References

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