

**Independent Project with Specialization in English
Studies and Education**

15 Credits, First Cycle

**SEL strategies to improve EFL and ESL
students' communication skill**

*SEL strategier för att förbättra EFL och ESL studenters
kommunikationsförmåga*

Bachelor of Primary Education: School Years 4-6, 240 credits

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2025-03-02

Abstract

Social and emotional learning concepts are central to improving EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) students' verbal and nonverbal communication skills. However, students struggle during discussions and oral presentations, as documented in Pärleros (2019) podcast. This has led to presentation anxiety and low self-esteem for many students, including EFL and ESL. Gibbons (2006) addresses that ESL students know the basics of the English language but cannot differentiate between academic and conversational usage. As middle school teachers and passionate communicators, we became interested in this field. The aim is to answer two questions: (1) how do SEL strategies impact EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills? and (2) what role does it play in improving speaking and active listening in students' interactions? The literature review is split into sections, to address these questions. The first section introduces the area and defines key terms like communication, EFL, ESL, SEL and English language learning. The second section presents the methodological approach, selected articles and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The third section presents the results from other studies and shows their connection to specific themes. The fourth section discusses the relevance of our aim and question and the challenges and limitations. The final section summarises the literature review and concludes with three statements. This relates to SEL and acknowledges areas that will be further explored in future research. With this abstract, the reader clearly understands what the literature review will provide.

Individual contribution

We hereby confirm our equal contribution in producing this paper:

- Planning the process and outline of the study
- Selecting a research question
- Selecting search criteria and searching for reliable sources
- Presentation of findings, conclusion and discussion

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1. Introduction

This literature review examines the development of verbal and non-verbal communication skills in English during middle school, where cognitive skills such as learning are used to acquire, analyse, and integrate information (Säljö, 2020). The students need a solid foundation for formulating their thoughts for discussion and verbal communication skills for active class participation (APA, 2014). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), communication significantly influences students' learning, behaviour, and emotional well-being, making this developmental stage particularly important. Non-verbal cues such as gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions play a key role in helping students comprehend teachers' instructions and engage more effectively in the classroom.

As stated in the Swedish curriculum (2022), students must continuously deepen their understanding of English and build upon their existing knowledge each year. However, during our VFU (Workplace-Based Education), we observed instances where English teachers conducted lessons without providing clear instructions or explanations. This lack of effective communication created a gap that left students feeling confused and uncertain about how to proceed. These observations led us to explore the crucial role of communication skills in education. Specifically, we aim to investigate how both verbal and non-verbal communication can enhance the development of English proficiency for learners of English as a foreign or secondary language.

1.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL)

In countries such as Sweden, English is classified as a foreign language since it is not an official language and is therefore not used as a daily spoken language. Nevertheless, the Swedish curriculum (Lgr22) includes English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a compulsory subject starting from grade 1 or 2 (ages 7–8) through to upper secondary school. By participating in EFL activities, students increase their awareness of learning,

plan, track, and evaluate their progress. While literature offers real-world examples of how language is used, it is crucial to incorporate it into EFL instruction so that students can use it in a meaningful and contextual way. Abdelhalim (2015) highlights that authenticity, as well as cultural and social values, are the three important aspects of a literary education program, which should be adapted to the interests and needs of students. Furthermore, their research indicates that integrating language teaching with children's literature enhances students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Rather than focusing primarily on grammar, relating classroom learning to real-world situations makes learning more meaningful and effective. This may be more beneficial for language development (Abdelhalim, 2015).

English as a Second Language" refers to a field of language instruction designed for individuals whose first language is not English, especially in countries where English is an official language and is widely used in everyday life, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. The purpose of ESL is to support students in using English effectively in various social and professional situations (Domínguez Romero & Bobkina,2023). Focusing on all aspects of language learning such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading is important for developing ESL skills. Reading and using real stories or texts from other cultures that evoke feelings, thoughts, and language in real-life contexts is a great way to engage the students during class. According to Domínguez Romero and Bobkina (2023), a good and effective way to teach ESL is to use films/trailers to spark interest and let students role-play to make them feel confident in the language. It will also allow them to learn how to communicate with others. It is important for teachers who teach English ESL to encourage students to ask questions related to assignments, to understand better or let them mix their mother tongue if they need more vocabulary (Domínguez Romero & Bobkina,2023).

1.2 Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

The CASEL organization (2022) defines Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as a process through which young learners and adults acquire and apply SEL strategies to develop healthy identities, manage emotions in situations such as oral presentations, and

achieve personal goals. The document video demonstrates the behaviours and shows the progression when SEL strategies were integrated into English lessons. The definition of SEL strategies aligns with the fundamental values and mission of schools as stated in the Swedish curriculum.

Furthermore, SEL supports the development of positive relationships and responsible decision-making, which Lutz (2021) discusses from a relational perspective. Both sources correspond to social relationships in students' development, which is the most important when creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Yang's study (2021) further illustrates how integrating SEL helps students develop essential skills and enhances educators' SEL competencies and online teaching effectiveness, particularly during the pandemic.

Three central concepts in our study are Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and English as a Second Language (ESL). To clarify how these terms are used, we will provide brief definitions and examples, particularly in the context of primary education, to illustrate their impact.

1.3 Importance of English communication in primary school as ESL and EFL

Communication is defined as a social interaction where information is shared verbally or nonverbally between a sender and a receiver (Jensen, 2023). Jensen defines verbal communication as a part of the symbol system where speakers implement verbal phrases like lead questions, idioms and transition phrases to guide the listeners through the content. In non-verbal communication, the speaker uses functional hand gestures, facial expressions and body language. However, non-verbal communication is excluded from the symbol system, even though Philips (2019) sees them as equally important for a presentation. One explanation is when showing a result by raising or lowering your hand or counting down the subjects that your presentation will address with your

fingers. This gives you a brief understanding of what verbal and non-verbal communication is, which will help you understand the upcoming sections. Before proceeding to the methodological section, it is equally important to understand how communication relates to the English subject.

1.4 Communication for English Language Learning

Many authors have explained the importance of communication roles in English language learning. Gibbons (2006) addresses the lack of confidence of ESL students to participate in an oral presentation. Low self-confidence, according to Gibbons, is due to the difference between academic and conversational English. Therefore, more oral practice is required to improve their academic English (Pärleros's, 2019).

According to Skolverket (2022), Swedish schools are responsible for promoting students' social and emotional development. Education should convey and anchor respect for human rights, uphold democratic values and promote inclusion, understanding and empathy.

The Swedish curriculum states that communication skills are the main focus area of the English syllabus (Skolverket, 2022). According to the English curriculum, students will be given opportunities to improve verbal and non-verbal communication skills by using them in a relevant and useful way. In addition, speaking, listening, reading and writing skills to support communication in different contexts.

2. Aim and Research Question(s)

This literature review explores how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies influence the verbal and non-verbal communication skills of middle school EFL and ESL students. SEL is widely used to enhance social and emotional attributes, such as

managing stress, building confidence, and promoting positive interactions during oral presentations and discussions. Research indicates that SEL and EFL positively impact students' empathy, a core competency emphasised in Skolverket's (2022) Swedish school curriculum.

2.1 The Research Questions

1. How do SEL strategies influence EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills?
2. What role does SEL play in improving speaking and active listening in student interactions?

3. Method

This literature review adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) method, which ensures a comprehensive and systematic approach to identifying, evaluating and analysing previous studies within a chosen area. As defined by Norris and Ortega (2006), there are two syntheses, known as meta-analysis synthesis (quantitative) and narrative synthesis (qualitative). The meta-analysis synthesis uses a statistical technique to aggregate and analyse multiple studies, find patterns, measure effect sizes, and draw generalisable conclusions across studies. This method could be challenging because it requires many articles to find a correlation between them. The narrative synthesis uses a qualitative approach that systematically reviews, summarises and interprets findings from studies without relying on statistical methods. This method requires a lesser number of articles and gives an in-depth explanation of the subject. Consequently, the challenge could be to avoid subjective writing because the researcher must interpret the information for the literature review areas. This makes the narrative synthesis approach relevant because our focus is to explore the impact that SEL strategies have on EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills, as shown in Abdelhalim's (2015) study, as well as the role SEL plays in improving speaking and active listening

in student interactions. Therefore, the literature review has selected existing research as primary sources to both compare the SEL strategies in diverse education school systems, as well as give credibility to the authors, who have laid the foundation for using social-emotional learning strategies in primary school education.

To guarantee source reliability and relevance we chose two of the largest educational research databases: ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre) and Education Research Complete (ERC). These databases were selected because of their extensive peer-reviewed journal articles and educational studies covering SEL, EFL and ESL topics.

3.1 Collection Procedures and Keywords

Our initial search focused on social-emotional learning (SEL) in primary school. The first search used the keywords "**social-emotional learning OR social-emotional development OR SEL AND middle school AND social.**" This search yielded 200 articles in ERIC and 163 articles in Education Research Complete (ERC). However, most of these articles addressed SEL in preschool, high school, or individuals with psychological disorders—topics that were not directly relevant to our literature review.

To refine our search, we adjusted the keywords to "**social-emotional learning OR social-emotional development OR SEL OR social competence AND middle school AND (verbal communication OR class).**" This modification resulted in 117 hits in ERIC and 65 hits in ERC.

To obtain more relevant results, we further refined our key terms to "**social-emotional learning OR EFL OR ESL AND middle school AND (strategies OR methods OR techniques).**" This broader search produced 1,089 hits in ERIC and 155 hits in ERC, offering a more comprehensive selection of articles related to our research question.

3.2 Search Scheme

The table below summarises our systematic search process and includes databases, search dates, Boolean search strings, number of hits and inclusion/ exclusion process.

3.3 Table of The Search Overview Scheme

Databases	Date	Boolean search strings	Hits/ Results	Exclusion/ Inclusion	Selection
ERIC	N/A	"social-emotional learning OR social-emotional development OR SEL AND middle school AND social"	200	Excluded: Preschool, high school, psychological disorders	Not relevant
ERC	N/A	"social-emotional learning OR social-emotional development OR SEL AND middle school AND social"	163	Excluded: Preschool, high school, psychological disorders Excluded: Limited articles	Not relevant
ERIC	N/A	"social-emotional learning OR social-emotional development OR SEL OR social competence AND middle school AND (verbal	117	Partially relevant: Focus on middle school, but still contains preschool/high school articles	Partly Selected

		communication OR class)"			
ERC	N/A	"social-emotional learning OR social-emotional development OR SEL OR social competence AND middle school AND (verbal communication OR class)"	65	Partially relevant: Focus on middle school, but still contains preschool/high school articles	Partly Selected
ERIC	N/A	"social-emotional learning OR EFL OR ESL AND middle school AND (strategies OR methods OR techniques)"	1,089	Relevant: Middle school education, EFL/ESL students, verbal & nonverbal communication skills	Selected
ERC	N/A	"social-emotional learning OR EFL OR ESL AND middle school AND (strategies OR methods OR techniques)"	155	Relevant: Middle school education, EFL/ESL students, verbal & nonverbal communication skills	Selected

3.4 Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of article selection

The articles have specific criteria based on the theme focusing on social-emotional learning, especially verbal and nonverbal communication. The age group is 10-12 years, corresponding to school grades 4-6. Most importantly, the content is relevant for both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL). An appropriate peer review publication within the range and year (2011-2024) ensures alignment with the research question. The articles are best aligned with social-emotional learning (SEL) and the impact of verbal and non-verbal communication.

3.5 Exclusion

We found that some articles did not align with our research question, as these articles were based on for example “Online Teaching Self-Efficacy, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies, and Compassion Fatigue among Educators during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. Although some of them addressed aspects of social-emotional learning (SEL) in the mathematics context, it was not directly related to our literature review question about how SEL strategies affect verbal and non-verbal communication skills in English classes. Therefore, we exclude them from our list.

3.6 Table of Our Selected Articles

Title	Description of study
<p>Coelho, V. A. (ORCID: 0000-0001-6427-4420), Brás, P., & Matsopoulos, A. (ORCID: 0000-0002-9145-2680).(2021).Differential Effectiveness of an Elementary School Social and Emotional Learning Program during Middle School Transition in Portugal. <u>School Psychology</u>. Nov 2021 36(6):475-482. Page count: 8 Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>This study investigates how a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program implemented during elementary school impacts students as they transition to middle school. It examines variations in program effectiveness based on factors such as age, gender, or social context.</p>
<p>Duncan, R., Washburn, I. J., Lewis, K. M., Bavarian, N., DuBois, D. L., Acock, A. C.,</p>	<p>This study evaluates the impact of the Positive Action (PA) program, a universal social-emotional</p>

<p>Vuchinich, S., & Flay, B. R.(2016). Can Universal SEL Programs Benefit Universally? Effects of the Positive Action Program on Multiple Trajectories of Social-Emotional and Misconduct Behaviors. <u>Grantee Submission</u>. 2016 Page count: 32 Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>learning (SEL) intervention on students' social-emotional skills and misconduct behaviours over time.</p>
<p>Dawoud, L., Hasim, Z., & Mohd Saad, M. R.(2024). Exploring Students' Perspectives on the Use of Drama Techniques in EFL Speaking Lessons <u>Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences</u>. 2024 12(1):29-37. http://mojes.um.edu.my/ EISSN: 2289-3024 Page count: 9 Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>This study investigates how drama techniques are employed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking lessons and how students perceive their effectiveness. It focuses on students' views regarding the impact of drama activities, such as role-play and improvisation, in enhancing their speaking skills</p>
<p>Gómez Palacio, C(2010).Strategies to Help ESL Students Improve Their Communicative Competence and Class Participation: A Study in a Middle School. <u>HOW</u>. Dec 2010 17(1):73-89. page counts: 17</p>	<p>explains the concept, which refers to a learner's ability to use language effectively and appropriately in various social contexts. This includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.</p>

Eric via EBSCO	
<p>Marzuki, A., Prayogo, J. W., and Wahyudi, A. (2016). Improving the EFL Learners' Speaking Ability through Interactive Storytelling. <u>Dinamika Ilmu</u>. 2016 16(1):15-34. page count: 20</p> <p>Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>This study centres on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and aims to improve learners' speaking abilities. An essential yet challenging skill in language acquisition.</p>
<p>Masadis, G., Filippou, F., Derri, V., Mavridis, G., & Rokka, S.(2019). Traditional Dances as a Means of Teaching Social Skills to Elementary School Students <u>International Journal of Instruction</u>. Jan 2019 12(1):511-520. Page count: 10</p> <p>Eric via EBSCO.</p>	<p>This study examines how engaging in traditional dances can help children develop essential social skills such as cooperation, communication, and respect for others.</p>
<p>Poulou, M. S. (ORCID: 0000-0003-4196-401X), & Garner, P.(2024). Students' Other-Oriented Cognitions: The Roles of Teachers' Emotional Competence and Classroom Social Support in a Greek Sample. <u>School Psychology International</u>. 2024 45(5):545-568 Page count: 24</p>	<p>This study examines how teachers' emotional competence and the level of social support in the classroom influence students' behaviours, cognitive competence and social skills in classroom.</p>

<p>Eric via EBSCO</p>	
<p>Pan, Y. (ORCID: 0000-0003-1901-1159), Liang, S., Shek, D. T. L., Zhou, D., & Lin, X.(2023). Perceived School Climate And Adolescent Behaviors among Chinese Adolescents: Mediating Effect of Social-Emotional Learning Competencies. <u>Psychology in the Schools</u>. Sep 2023 60(9):3435-3451 Page count: 17 Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>This study investigates how adolescents' perceptions of their school climate influence their behaviours. The researchers explore how a positive school climate contributes to the development of SEL skills</p>
<p>Ricker, G., Angosta, J.(2024). Enhancing Social and Emotional Competencies in Rural Middle School Students: A Cluster-Randomized Study on Character Playbook. <u>Rural Educator</u>. 2024 45(3):34-45 Page Count: 14 Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>The study investigates the <i>Character Playbook</i>, a program designed to develop social and emotional learning (SEL) skills among rural middle school students.</p>

<p>Silverthorn, N., DuBois, D. L., Lewis, K. M., Reed, A., Bavarian, N., Day, J., Ji, P., Acock, A. C., Vuchinich, S., & Flay, B. R. (2017). Effects of a school-based social-emotional and character development program on self-esteem levels and processes: A cluster-randomized controlled trial. SAGE Open. 7(3). Page Count: 12 Eric via EBSCO</p>	<p>This study investigates the impact of a structured social-emotional and character development (SECD) program on students' self-esteem. Using a cluster-randomised controlled trial design.</p>
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4. Results

This study examined how SEL strategies influence the verbal and non-verbal communication skills of EFL and ESL students. The research questions guiding this analysis were: (1) How do SEL strategies impact EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills? and (2) What role does SEL play in improving speaking and active listening in student interactions? The findings are presented according to the following themes: (1) The Importance of Positive Behavioral Development, (2) Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Development (CD), and (3) Impact on Student Behavior and Processes.

4.1 The Importance of Positive Behavioral Development

Several studies identify social and behavioral challenges among middle school students, which can affect their academic performance and future social integration. Duncan et al. (2016), Ricker and Angosta (2024), and Silverthorn et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of developing social skills and self-esteem in their respective contexts.

Both Duncan et al. (2016) and Silverthorn et al. (2017) focus on middle school students in California while Ricker and Angosta (2024) analyse the effects of SEL in rural schools. Nevertheless, these studies address the potential risks that may lead both urban and rural students to engage in substance abuse or violent actions, often stemming from poor social skills and low self-esteem. In contrast, Gómez Palacio (2010), Pan et al. (2023) and Poulou and Garner (2024) see the classroom environment and teacher-student relationships as essential for reducing such behaviours. This aligns with Sweden's curriculum guidelines for norms and values (Skolverket, 2022).

Behavioural challenges remain a common problem in education worldwide. Coelho et al. (2021) analysed the impact of the SEL program on middle school students in Portugal, confirming its effectiveness and potential applicability in primary education. Similarly, Dawoud et al. (2024) highlight the importance of participation, collaboration and sharing ideas in English lessons, which are key skills emphasised in the Palestinian curriculum. Because of globalisation and advancing communication skills in Greek society, students are demanded to be socially skilled to succeed. Masadis et al. (2019) have incorporated peer-related activities, establishing rules to maintain a controlled environment and promoting cooperation among students. Such measures support social and emotional learning but also enhance students' well-being and self-esteem.

Marzuki et al. (2016) similarly examine SEL strategies to improve EFL students' speaking skills. However, their study does not address behavioral gaps in Indonesian schools. Although not directly relevant to this theme, it serves as a useful reference for later discussions on the role of SEL in developing speaking skills. The next theme examines social-emotional learning (SEL) and character development (CD) in the selected studies.

4.2 Social-emotional learning (SEL) and Character Development (CD)

This theme explores the implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) and character development (CD) in middle school education. Although these initiatives share similar strategies, their outcomes vary depending on the specific goals of the studies.

Both Duncan et al. (2016) and Silverthorn et al. (2017) incorporated a cluster randomized controlled trial of the Positive Action program, randomly assigning students to either an intervention or a control group. While both studies focused on SEL, their goals differed. Duncan et al. (2016) study featured classroom-based strategies, particularly teaching self-control and prosocial interaction to boost students' confidence. In contrast, Silverthorn et al. (2017) analysed the broader outcomes of the Positive Action program. Equally, Coelho et al. (2021) implemented an SEL program in Portugal to support students' transition to high school by strengthening self-awareness and social awareness.

In comparison, Pan et al. (2023) have also applied similar SEL activities to tackle behavioural challenges by developing these same skills as Coelho et al. (2021), in addition to interpersonal relationship abilities. In contrast, Ricker and Angosta's (2024) study took a digital approach with their Character Playbook program to boost rural students' SEL skills and confidence. This strategy lines up closely with Coelho et al.'s and Pan et al.'s aspect of integrating activities that enhance SEL competencies, social and self-awareness. Even though the selected articles use various methods, five of those studies review SEL strategies as an effective concept and support its integration across lessons, including English.

Moreover, both Dawoud et al. (2024) and Masadis et al. (2019) have implemented practical techniques in their studies. This approach provided additional insights and alternative ways to include SEL in school education. Also, Dawoud et al. (2024) incorporated cooperative drama techniques to improve sixth graders' speaking abilities. Masadis et al. (2019) study explored the use of traditional Greek dances, which engaged

students to participate in group collaboration. Both studies have demonstrated that such activities work to effectively enhance students' social and communication skills. This complements the findings of the SEL-focused research. Marzuki et al. (2016) has also added to the research area by implementing interactive storytelling to enhance EFL students' speaking and listening skills. In addition, the fictional environment encouraged students' participation and reduced anxiety about making mistakes during activities. This method engaged students' imagination while connecting folktale narratives to real-life experiences.

Gómez Palacio (2010) used role-playing and information-gap exercises to increase engagement and oral participation in ESL lessons. This approach aligns with the practical methods employed by Dawoud et al. (2024) and Masadis et al. (2019), which also emphasise collaboration and interaction. Poulou and Garner (2024) highlighted how such social and emotional interactions, whether positive or disruptive, are part of teachers' daily experiences and impact classroom dynamics. The next theme will discuss the outcomes of these strategies and identify areas for future research.

4.3 Impact on Student Behaviour and Processes

The impact of these strategies on student behaviour and learning processes is supported by various studies examining social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions. The following section presents findings on changes in students' self-esteem, emotional understanding and social behaviours, along with reflections on teacher-student interactions and classroom dynamics.

Duncan et al. (2016) identified two distinct student groups: the high/declining and low/stable groups when assessing the Positive Action (PA) program's impact. The program effectively enhanced SEL and character development across both groups, reducing misconduct and promoting positive behaviours. However, the researchers emphasised the need for further studies across diverse demographic settings to evaluate the program's generalizability. Similarly, Silverthorn et al. (2017) observed increased self-

esteem among minority, low-income youth, in addition to attributing this growth to positive peer interactions and supportive school environments during the PA programs.

In line with these outcomes, Coelho et al. (2021) present statistical evidence of positive behaviours on two separate occasions for middle school grades, showing increased self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-control. Additionally, students developed stronger relationships with their peers and teachers. Pan et al. (2023) complement these findings by highlighting the broader social impact of strong SEL skills, such as improved mental health, prosocial behaviours, and reduced bullying and violence. While Pan et al. (2023) emphasise the broader social benefits of SEL skills, the potential for these skills to be developed through digital interventions is explored by Ricker and Angosta (2024). Their study examines how the Character Playbook program enhances students' self-confidence and understanding of social concepts. Initially, the results were below the expected standard. However, after careful examination, students who participated demonstrated significantly higher knowledge of social and emotional concepts compared to those in the control group. Additionally, students were more confident after completing the program. Conversely, the authors have acknowledged the limitations in their study, such as sample size and missing data. They recommend that future studies confirm its effectiveness on larger samples and diverse types of rural students. Both Coelho et al. (2021) and Pan et al. (2023) emphasise the need for further research to explore the long-term effects of SEL programmes across different contexts, including international regions, age groups, and diverse demographics. Even though Ricker and Angosta (2024) share similar objectives, the article suggests several tests before concluding its effectiveness on students' SEL skills. These findings show positive outcomes and highlight key areas for further exploration, along with practical methods discussed in other studies.

While most studies focus on SEL programs to enhance social and emotional learning and build students' self-confidence, Dawoud et al., Masidis et al. and Marzuki et al. distinguish themselves by utilising practical methods like role-playing, storytelling and traditional dancing. Dawoud et al. (2024) report that students had a positive outlook on the drama techniques during the interviews. The majority explained that these

techniques helped students achieve the lesson goal and foster their potential. Likewise, Masadis et al. (2019) introduce traditional dancing to enhance teamwork and social skills to upper-class students. Even though traditional dancing was an optimal choice for this purpose, the student was engaged in dancing activities and individually enhanced nonverbal communication skills, which aligns with the literature review aim. Also, those students who participated in group dancing have had healing benefits, alongside dealing with emotional and physical discomforts such as anxiety, social isolation and anger issues. Marzuki et al. (2016) implemented storytelling exercises to improve speaking ability and introduce an alternative technique outside of role-playing and traditional dancing. The outcome was also positive, along with ensuring a success rate of 100% when committing to the exercises.

In comparison, all articles suggest further research to explore the long-term effectiveness of practical exercise in culturally and geographically unstable areas. Their practical techniques could be more effective in unstable areas like Palestine, Lebanon and Afghanistan, in comparison to wealthier countries like Great Britain, the United States and Sweden. These findings complement each other and suggest various activities to use for students.

These last two studies focus on SEL strategies from teachers' perspectives. Both Gómez Palacio (2010) and Poulou and Garner (2024) analyse teachers' use of SEL strategies in different subjects. For teachers, the SEL strategies increased their relationships and motivated students during the lessons. Additionally, the lessons became more effective and meaningful, which surprised the teachers. They aim to influence more teachers to implement SEL strategies and practice the techniques. Those methods will both improve the relationships between their students and increase their understanding of the subject.

5. Discussion

The discussion aims to answer the two literature review questions: (1) How can SEL strategies impact EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills? and (2) What role does SEL play in improving speaking and active listening in student interactions? The findings will be connected to the chosen subject area and our specific professional practices as teachers. Additionally, the discussion also reflects on obstacles encountered during the literature review, such as decisions about including or excluding methods and selecting themes for the results section. Finally, the section concludes by identifying opportunities for further research, which will be explored in the upcoming thesis examination.

5.1 How SEL strategies can impact EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills?

One of the main findings of this review revealed the importance of SEL strategies that significantly affect the verbal and nonverbal communication skills of EFL and ESL students. Storytelling, role-playing, and positive action programs are the techniques that help students express themselves more confidently while improving their ability to interpret and respond to nonverbal cues. Masadis et al. (2019) state that Traditional Greek dance is a nonverbal activity to help students express their emotions. Group dance has had healing benefits in dealing with negative emotions such as unpleasant feelings, tension, pain, anger, and isolation since ancient times. The circular nature of traditional dance helps strengthen the bonds between dancers and ensures the establishment of social skills. Students who participate in SEL activities that promote a sense of belonging with teachers and peers develop their group cooperation and team spirit while reducing feelings of depression and loneliness.

According to English syllabus, reception is a skill that includes understanding of spoken language and texts, and whereas production and interaction is expressing oneself and

interacting with others in speech and writing, as well as adapting language to suit different contexts, purposes and target groups (Skoverket, 2022).

Moreover, Pan et al. (2023) define SEL as competencies that combine both skills and abilities that affect internalising and externalising behaviours. Depression and self-blame, anxiety, are examples of internalizing behaviors. Externalizing behaviors such as physical and verbal aggression, which result in destructive and harmful behaviors, strong SEL skills help individuals manage these emotions.

These findings align with established theories such as social constructivism, which underlines the role of social interactions in learning (Säljö, 2020) and cooperative learning, which highlights the benefits of collaboration between stronger and weaker learners (Spencer & Jette, 2018). Every child has the right to express their views and to be heard in all matters affecting them. Every child has the right to express their views and to be heard in all matters affecting them. The child's views shall be considered by the child's age and maturity (UNICEF Sweden, 2018, Article 12).

Social constructivism highlights how SEL strategies such as role-playing promote meaningful social interactions, which provide opportunities for language learning and the development of communication skills. On one hand, EFL and ESL students will benefit from these improvements while also creating positive relationships during the lessons. On the other hand, general students will feel less anxiety in social activities and oral presentations, advancing them to a higher level when transitioning to high school and upper secondary school.

Cooperative learning organises teamwork-based SEL activities that enhance students' social and emotional learning. While one actively engages students in group discussions, another has students use gestures and facial expressions to communicate (Spencer & Jette, 2018). Furthermore, Jette (2003) argues about the positive and

negative outcomes that cooperative learning has received when it challenges students' intellection and social skills at different levels. This makes cooperative learning especially effective for EFL students attending classes, as opposed to traditional lessons in the USA, where students felt less enjoyment and caused many to fail the subjects. In conclusion, cooperative learning has improved student's self-esteem and well-being, in addition to reducing bullying and substance abuse in the classroom, with similar effects that SEL programs bring. Pan (2023) argues that positive school environments are the foundation for effective learning.

Research has shown that teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships within the school climate play an important role in shaping adolescent developmental outcomes. These SEL competencies can be further strengthened through constructive peer interactions (Pan et al., 2023).

Both theories can implement SEL strategies to enhance these areas and help EFL and ESL students in social interactions. Those methods are common in any education system, including Swedish school education and are stated in Skolverkets (2022) sheer document, in addition to other guides, such as the expression form for beginners (Skolverket, 2024) or the four aspects of digital competencies (Skolverket, no date). These strategies are equally important for EFL and ESL students learning as for teachers' practical professions. Poulou and Garner (2024) address a couple of social and emotional situations that teachers encounter daily in their work, for example using storytelling techniques to engage students in a story or eliminating insults and bullying inside and outside of the classroom. In contrast, Ricker and Angosta (2024) point out the effect that teachers have on ESL students in the concept of social and emotional learning in rural schools. Those who received more attention and positive feedback from the teacher had significantly better social skills than those without the teacher's help. However, the studies indicate two potential issues with integrating SEL programs in different education. The first is the lack of resource funds to hire educated SEL lecturers in those lessons. As a result of the low income, school administrators have directed the responsibility to their employed teachers. In this case, Skolverket (2015)

states that resource incomes should be distributed depending on a student's disability and needs. The second is teachers' time limitation. Because of the low resource income, teachers have been tasked with the SEL programs, in addition to the objects shown in Ricker and Angosta (2024) study. Therefore, leads to either being less educated in SEL strategies or having the time to organise a well-planned lesson. Similar concerns that teachers are struggling with in Swedish schools.

5.2 What role does SEL play in improving speaking and active listening in student interactions?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides students with important life skills, including self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2022). According to Coelho et al. (2021) and Pan et al. (2023) studies, which have shown a direct impact of SEL on students approaching social interactions and engaging in meaningful conversations.

Even though the literature review concentrates on verbal and non-verbal communication skills. According to the National Education Association, SEL is important for improving students' active listening and speaking skills. Students can become more receptive and involved in discussions by developing their emotional intelligence and empathy, which will result in greater understanding and improved communication. The Education Act (2010:800) emphasizes the importance of education in promoting students' development and learning as well as a lifelong desire to learn.

Additionally, social awareness and empathy guide students in seeing situations from others' perspectives (Skolverket, 2022). Research has also shown that having high SEL skills leads to improvements in individuals' social behaviour as well as their mental health and school performance, resulting in a reduction in bullying and violence in school. In contrast, individuals with lower SEL skills may have behavioural problems such as involvement in crime, substance abuse, and depression (Pan et al., 20). Like

resolution, listening to others' ideas or stands on a specific subject increases SEL competency. Teachers encounter conflicts that often require the perspective of the involved students. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 13), the child has the right to freedom of expression, which shall include the ability to seek, receive and share ideas and information of all kinds in different forms and regardless of boundaries, whether verbally, in writing or non-verbally, in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

The next section will address the challenges with the literature review and areas to further explore in the thesis examination.

5.3 Challenges in Implementing SEL Strategies and Future Research

Directions

While extensive research highlights the benefits of SEL programmes in fostering student well-being and academic success, the path to effective implementation remains complex. Despite the school administrations' efforts to provide various levels of institutional support for EFL and ESL students, limited training, resources, funds and time constraints are a continuous problem. This can be seen in both Poulou and Garner's (2024) and Ricker and Angosta's (2024) studies, this barrier affected students' learning potential and teachers' mental well-being. As argued by Poulou and Garner (2024), teachers encounter situations that require SEL competence from parents, students, and school administration. Likewise, Ricker and Angosta (2024) claims that limited support was a problem because of low resource funds and highly trained SEL professionals in rural schools. Instead of alternative solutions, the administration taught the employed teacher to become competent in these areas. As evidents show by International education and development research, that teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) and ability are important in creating classroom environments that support students' behavioural, intellectual, and social-emotional development (Poulou & Garner, 2024). In the future, we shall focus our study on the skills of speaking and active listening during interactive classroom activities. We plan to select research articles that explore these communication skills and their roles in student learning and engagement. Additionally, we intend to conduct interviews with Swedish teachers to gain insights

into their experiences and strategies for fostering effective interaction in the classroom. This will aid us in creating a better understanding of how these skills are developed in practice.

6. Conclusion

The literature review aimed to investigate how SEL strategies impact EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication and its role in improving resolution and active listening in student interactions. The research has also highlighted key findings that have added to the results. In short, Duncan et al. (2016) and Silverthorn et al. (2017) examined the effect that social-emotional learning (SEL), and character development (CD) had on EFL and ESL students in the United States. Ricker and Angosta (2024) used a digital Character Playbook program with rural students. The results were below average, showing a slight improvement in social and emotional skills. Coelho et al. (2021) and Pan et al. (2023) both aimed to improve SEL competencies, social and self-awareness, and interpersonal relationship skills in non-English speaking countries such as Portugal and China. Dawoud et al. (2024) and Masadis et al. (2019) implemented drama and traditional Greek dances to improve social and emotional skills among students. Similarly, Gómez Palacios' (2010) study examines the effect of storytelling and role-playing for ESL and LA-based classes. Poulou and Garner (2024) take the perspective of teachers and reveal different SEL strategies they used in English. Finally, Marzuki et al. (2016) integrate SEL strategies to improve EFL students' speaking skills in Indonesian. These findings add to the rapidly growing field of SEL programs and summarise three key findings from our study:

- SEL programs and character development are effective strategies to improve EFL and ESL students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills. In addition, SEL strategies improve students' skills in building social relationships and managing their emotional control. Therefore, students need the necessary skills to interact socially with others and control their emotions during activities such as group discussions or oral presentations.

- Social and emotional learning (SEL) can be integrated into subjects such as mathematics, science and history, which provides comparable benefits. The Swedish National Agency for Education, recognizing its importance, has highlighted these aspects in the Swedish curriculum.
- Although SEL strategies have received positive feedback from other researchers, limited resources and teachers' time limitations are still a problem. For example, public and private Swedish schools may avoid hiring professionally trained SEL instructors due to financial issues, even though students require the SEL exercises. To address this issue, school administrators require teachers to become SEL experts, in addition to their other responsibilities.

These conclusions suggest that more research is needed to understand the SEL programs' effectiveness in those areas. Additionally, we want to conduct a quantitative study, where we analyse and interview teachers' SEL competencies in Sweden. The results will reveal whether Sweden exceeds in implementing strategies that improve social and emotional learning or has prioritised other areas before SEL.

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