



Integrating Social-Emotional Learning in English Language Teaching: Teachers' Perspectives, Pedagogical Practices, and Challenges

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Abstract: This study aims to explore how Social-Emotional Learning is integrated into English Language Teaching by examining teachers' perspectives, pedagogical practices, and implementation challenges, and to provide pedagogical implications for enhancing ELT practices, focusing on the Indonesian context of Kota Langsa, Aceh. Using a mixed-methods design, the research employed 50 questionnaires containing 30 items to gather quantitative data and conducted 12 in-depth interviews to collect qualitative insights. The study involved 50 English teachers from junior and senior high schools in Kota Langsa, Indonesia, representing public, private, and Islamic boarding schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including independent-samples t-tests, with SPSS. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Integration of both strands enabled triangulation, generating findings that were both statistically grounded and contextually rich. Results indicated that while teachers demonstrated high awareness of SEL benefits ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.45$), their classroom practice remained moderate ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.52$), revealing a significant awareness-practice gap. Institutional constraints, limited training, and cultural issues were identified as major barriers, with public school teachers reporting more systemic challenges than private school teachers ($p = 0.003$, Cohen's $d = 0.88$). Qualitative findings highlighted culturally responsive practices, such as integrating Islamic narratives, alongside the need for institutional support. The study concludes by recommending localized strategies and systematic training to bridge the gap between SEL awareness and classroom implementation.

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Introduction

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a major focus in modern education. It highlights the development of students' emotional intelligence, social skills, and self-confidence (Gimbert et al., 2023; Greenberg, 2023). In English Language Teaching (ELT), where communication and interaction are fundamentally important, SEL plays a critical role in promoting a positive and engaging learning environment. Research shows that SEL improves student motivation, classroom climate, and academic success in general (Bai et al., 2024). The inclusion of SEL allows students not only to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and manage the complexity of language learning, but also to strengthen emotional resilience, build confidence, develop empathy, and enhance collaboration skills (CASEL, 2020; Wigelsworth et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, these goals align closely with the Kurikulum Merdeka, which promotes the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, emphasizing character development, social responsibility, and emotional maturity alongside academic competence. However, despite these curricular expectations, classroom practices in many ELT settings remain predominantly test-oriented, with a strong emphasis on cognitive outcomes and



examination performance. This mismatch between national educational policy and classroom reality contributes to the inconsistent integration of SEL in ELT. The fragmented implementation of SEL across educational contexts therefore highlights the need for a more structured and sustainable approach within the ELT framework.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been widely recognized in general education; however, its application in English Language Teaching (ELT) remains underexplored. This is particularly important because language learning is inherently interactive, requiring learners to manage emotions and social relationships while communicating. Unlike subjects where content mastery can be prioritized independently of interpersonal interaction, language acquisition is deeply intertwined with emotional and social dynamics. Effective integration of SEL can foster a supportive classroom climate where students feel emotionally safe and confident using the target language (Harjunmaa et al., 2023). Research shows that emotionally supportive language classrooms increase participation, reduce anxiety, and strengthen learning persistence (Jin et al., 2021), while also encouraging learners to express themselves, take risks, and engage in meaningful communication beyond textbook exercises (Sackstein, 2021). Despite these benefits, many ELT teachers struggle to implement SEL due to limited formal training and the absence of structured pedagogical guidance. Moreover, prior studies have primarily focused on general education settings or teachers' perceptions in large urban areas, paying limited attention to how sociocultural contexts shape SEL practices. While previous studies have explored Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in metropolitan areas, little is known about its implementation in semi-urban contexts with strong cultural and religious values, such as Aceh, highlighting the need for context-sensitive research on how SEL is interpreted and enacted in diverse ELT environments.

The challenges of integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into ELT classrooms underscore the need for continued research and stronger teacher support. Many teachers face rigid curricula that prioritize linguistic competence over social-emotional development (McManus, 2022), while language pedagogy often emphasizes vocabulary, grammar, and standardized testing at the expense of affective learning. Cultural differences in emotional expression further complicate SEL implementation (Baker, 2020). In some contexts, emotional openness and personal reflection—key components of SEL—may be perceived as inappropriate or uncomfortable (Simion, 2023). This issue is particularly relevant in settings such as Langsa City, Aceh, where Islamic values and Acehnese cultural norms shape expectations around modesty, respect, and emotional restraint. While these values may appear to conflict with certain SEL practices that encourage open emotional expression, they may also align with SEL principles such as empathy, self-regulation, and social responsibility when approached through culturally responsive strategies. Additionally, time constraints and performance-oriented assessment systems limit teachers' ability to incorporate SEL-focused activities, as they must prioritize meeting language proficiency targets amid increasing academic demands (Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024). These contextual, cultural, and institutional challenges highlight the importance of examining how teachers interpret, adapt, and negotiate SEL within their specific sociocultural environments. Therefore, investigating English teachers' perceptions, experiences, and classroom practices in Langsa City, Aceh, becomes essential for understanding how SEL can be meaningfully and culturally appropriately integrated into ELT.

Since teachers are directly responsible for whether SEL integration is successful, understanding their perspectives becomes imperative. Teacher sentiment towards SEL and the challenges that they encounter heavily influence its implementation in the classroom (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). If the teachers feel that SEL is helpful for language acquisition,



they incorporate it into their curriculum. However, if they perceive SEL as another burden, SEL will not be investigated to its maximum potential. Teachers' attitudes determined by their experience in the past, training, and the strength of institutional support that they are exposed to can impact their willingness in incorporating SEL-oriented practices (Huynh et al., 2021). For instance, teachers who have observed the effects of SEL in the classroom can encourage its use at the universal level, whereas those that are unacquainted with SEL guidelines can resist its introduction. Also, the degree to which teachers feel confident they can fulfill the emotional and social requirements of the students can be the determinant factor of SEL incorporation (Gueldner et al., 2020). Without adequate understanding and knowledge, teachers may not be confident in dealing with students' emotional problems or facilitating effective SEL-informed discussions.

The objective of this research is to examine English language teachers' perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of implementing SEL in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Drawing on teachers' experiences and perceived challenges, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on SEL by providing insights into its role in comprehensive English language instruction that promotes both linguistic competence and social-emotional well-being. By critically analyzing the intersection between SEL and ELT, this research aims to support teachers in creating learning environments where students can develop both linguistically and emotionally. Finally, this study seeks to bridge the gap between language acquisition and emotional development, demonstrating that language learning involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also the development of essential life skills that enable learners to communicate effectively with confidence, empathy, and resilience.

Research Method

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), which integrates both quantitative and qualitative strands of research within the same phase of the study. In this design, quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires to capture measurable patterns of teachers' awareness, perceptions, and practices of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), while qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews to gain rich, contextualized insights into teachers' lived experiences and challenges. Both types of data were collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and then compared and integrated during the interpretation stage. The use of this design allowed the researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon: the quantitative strand provided generalizable trends and statistical comparisons, while the qualitative strand offered nuanced explanations and cultural insights that numbers alone could not reveal. This methodological complementarity strengthened the validity of the findings and ensured that both breadth and depth were addressed in examining SEL integration in English language teaching.

Two primary instruments were employed in this study to generate complementary data. The first instrument was a 30-item questionnaire adapted from the CASEL (2020) framework, which is widely recognized as the standard model for Social-Emotional Learning competencies. The questionnaire was designed to measure five key domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), enabling the researchers to quantify the degree of teachers' awareness and practices of SEL in their classrooms. This instrument provided a structured overview of patterns and levels of SEL integration among English language teachers, while also allowing



for statistical comparisons across school types and contexts. The second instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews, conducted with a subset of teachers selected through maximum variation sampling. The interview guide was developed to explore teachers' perceptions of SEL, their strategies for implementation, the cultural considerations that shaped their practices, and the specific barriers they encountered in the classroom. The semi-structured format allowed for consistency across interviews while also giving participants the flexibility to elaborate on personal experiences and insights. This qualitative tool was particularly valuable in uncovering the contextual and cultural dimensions of SEL that the questionnaire could not capture. Together, the questionnaire and interviews provided a comprehensive and balanced dataset, combining quantifiable trends with in-depth narratives to address the research questions.

The study involved 50 English language teachers from junior and senior high schools in Kota Langsa, Aceh Province, Indonesia. All participants had a minimum of three years of teaching experience, ensuring that they possessed sufficient professional background to reflect meaningfully on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) practices. The participants represented a diverse educational landscape, including public schools, private schools, and Islamic boarding schools, which provided a rich context for examining the intersection of SEL and ELT across different institutional and cultural settings. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with relevant exposure to SEL. From the initial group, 12 teachers were chosen for in-depth interviews using a maximum variation sampling strategy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach ensured representation across school types (government vs. private) and geographical settings (urban vs. semi-rural). Such diversity enabled the study to capture a wide range of experiences, challenges, and perspectives regarding the integration of SEL into English language teaching.

Data collection was conducted in two phases in line with the mixed-methods design. In the quantitative phase, the questionnaire was distributed to 50 English teachers across Kota Langsa. This phase aimed to generate a broad statistical overview of teachers' awareness and practices of SEL. The survey data provided measurable patterns that could be compared across school contexts and teacher demographics. While in the qualitative phase, 12 teachers were purposively selected from the larger group to participate in semi-structured interviews. The selection ensured representation from public, private, and semi-rural schools, reflecting the diverse educational environments of Kota Langsa, Indonesia. Interviews lasted between 45–60 minutes, were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate natural expression, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim to prepare for thematic analysis. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed member checking, where participants were given summaries of their responses to confirm accuracy and provide clarifications. This process ensured that the interpretations authentically represented teachers' perspectives. Moreover, conducting the research in two phases was essential for ensuring triangulation of findings. While the questionnaire provided a broad and generalizable overview of SEL perceptions and practices, the interviews offered depth by uncovering cultural and institutional factors behind the numbers. By integrating both strands, the study was able to generate findings that were not only statistically valid but also contextually meaningful, thereby strengthening the reliability and applicability of the conclusions.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) to identify overall trends and inferential statistics (independent-samples t-tests) to examine group differences, particularly between public and private school teachers. These analyses were conducted using SPSS software. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analyzed

through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with a six-phase framework. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading the interview transcripts repeatedly. Second, initial codes were generated through manual coding, with meaningful data segments systematically labeled without the use of qualitative analysis software. Third, the codes were examined and organized into potential themes by identifying patterns of shared meaning. Fourth, these themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the dataset. Fifth, themes were clearly defined and named to capture the essence of each pattern. Finally, the themes were synthesized and reported to illustrate key aspects of teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding the integration of Social-Emotional Learning in ELT contexts. The process highlighted key issues such as teachers' positive perceptions of SEL, cultural sensitivities in classroom application, lack of institutional support, and the use of local adaptations like Islamic narratives. Finally, findings from both strands were integrated following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) guidelines. This integration allowed for cross-validation of results, identification of complementary insights, and a richer interpretation of the data. The mixed-methods approach thus provided a holistic account of teachers' perceptions and challenges regarding SEL in English language teaching.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Perceptions of SEL: High Awareness, Limited Application

The descriptive statistical analysis outcomes showed a general positive attitude of respondents towards Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in the domain of their attitudes and self-concept as language teachers. More specifically, teachers displayed an extremely high level of self-awareness as represented by a mean score of 4.32 (SD = 0.45), indicating a deep and stable understanding of the affective, interpersonal, and relational processes on which effective language pedagogy and classroom interaction rest. This level of self-awareness suggests strong internalization of the affective components of pedagogy, such as empathy, reflective practice, and awareness of students' needs. However, despite this favourable attitude position, application or implementation of SEL strategies in the classroom was found to be only moderate, according to a mean score of 3.65 (SD = 0.52). This disparity between teachers' reported awareness and self-reported classroom practice indicates an instructional awareness-action gap, and the suggestion is that teachers do theoretically support SEL, but maybe one or more contextual, institutional, or individual barriers might get in the way of regularly applying SEL principles in their own classrooms (see Figure 1).

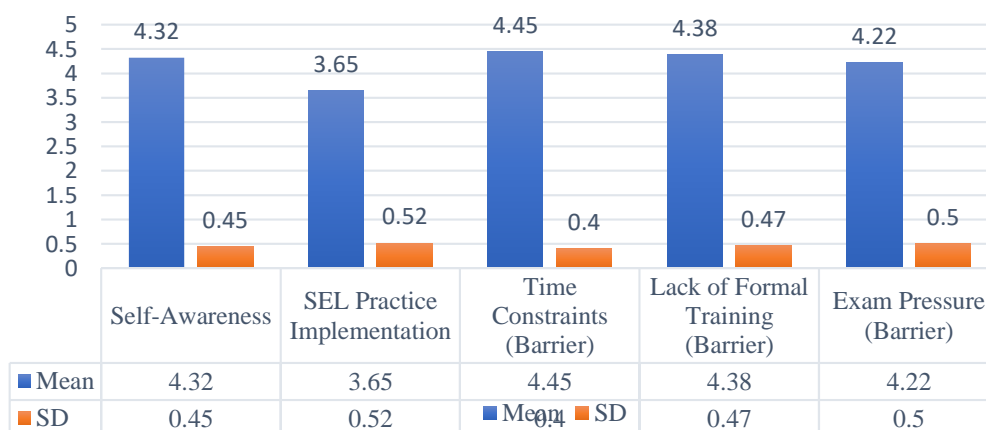


Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics of SEL Measures

These results demonstrate that despite teachers' great perception of the importance of SEL (high self-awareness mean), real implementation is constrained by outside factors like time, no training, and pressure to do well academically. Each barrier's high mean scores demonstrate systemic problems requiring institutional solutions. These findings also align with previous studies asserting that teacher buy-in alone is not sufficient for meaningful SEL integration (Ariza & Brown, 2022; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). Without targeted training and structural support, even high awareness may not translate into consistent classroom practice.

Institutional Context: Public Schools vs Private Schools

Comparison between private and public schools within groups revealed significant differences in the use of SEL in the two types of schools (see Table 2). Teachers in private schools reported greater implementation ($M = 3.85$) than public school teachers ($M = 3.52$), $t(48) = 2.15$, $p = .036$, and the effect size was medium (Cohen's $d = 0.63$). Furthermore, public school teachers indicated significantly more institutional barriers ($M = 4.50$ vs. 4.10), $t(48) = 3.11$, $p = .003$, with a large effect size ($d = 0.88$).

Table 1. Group Comparison: Public vs. Private Schools

Measure	Public Schools (n=30)	Private Schools (n=20)	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
SEL Implementation	3.52 (SD=0.55)	3.85 (SD=0.49)	2.15	0.036*	0.63 (medium)
Institutional Support (Barrier)	4.50 (SD=0.42)	4.10 (SD=0.48)	3.11	0.003**	0.88 (large)

*Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.01$

The public-private school comparison yielded statistically significant differences. Teachers in private schools reported more SEL implementation, which is likely linked to more positive institutional climates. Public school teachers, on the other hand, perceived more institutional barriers, the large effect size ($d = 0.88$) of which testifies to being a significant difference, suggesting more systemic issues within public education systems.

These findings also suggest organizational culture and administrative support strongly determine SEL integration (Gimbert et al., 2023). Public schools lack opportunities for flexibility, testing policies, and bureaucratic mandates appear to hinder general SEL application. Interestingly, no significant relationship between teaching experience and SEL confidence was found ($p = .27$), indicating professional development is more critical than tenure for SEL expertise (Gueldner et al., 2020). Contrary to expectations, there was no significant correlation between years of teaching experience and teachers' confidence in implementing SEL strategies ($p = 0.27$). This finding suggests that professional experience alone does not necessarily equip teachers with the knowledge or skills required for SEL integration. One possible explanation is that many senior teachers completed their training under earlier curricula that placed limited emphasis on the affective and social dimensions of learning, focusing primarily on linguistic competence and academic outcomes. As a result, both novice and experienced teachers may face similar uncertainties when attempting to apply SEL in ELT contexts. This highlights the importance of providing equitable and continuous professional development (PD) opportunities that specifically address SEL, ensuring that teachers of all career stages are supported in developing the pedagogical and emotional competencies required for effective implementation.

Qualitative Insights: Four Emergent Themes

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded four ultimate themes that frame the quantitative results, each supported by explicit participant quotes to capture lived experiences (see Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Qualitative Themes

Theme	Description	Quote
Positive Attitudes with Reservations	Teachers valued SEL but lacked confidence in implementation, often feeling unprepared.	<i>“SEL is important, but I often feel unsure how to apply it effectively.”</i> (Participant 5)
Cultural Sensitivities	Cultural norms made open emotional expression difficult, requiring sensitive approaches.	<i>“Students here are not comfortable sharing feelings openly; it’s part of our culture.”</i> (Participant 9)
Need for Institutional Support	Teachers highlighted insufficient training and resources, calling for structured institutional aid.	<i>“We need clear modules or training; otherwise, we are guessing what to do.”</i> (Participant 2)
Contextual Adaptations	Teachers developed creative, culturally relevant SEL strategies to increase student engagement.	<i>“We use Islamic stories to discuss empathy and patience—it works well for our students.”</i> (Participant 7)

Positive Attitudes with Reservations

All of the teachers interviewed confirmed the great potential of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in assisting students' emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and the building of a more caring and engaging classroom environment. They stressed SEL's role in reducing language anxiety, enhancing student motivation, and establishing a sense of belongingness, particularly in multilingual and diverse classrooms. However, despite this robust conceptual backing, a sizeable number of educators expressed concerns about their own abilities to use SEL strategies effectively in their daily teaching practices. These concerns were chiefly rooted in a lack of formal training, the absence of institutional guidelines, and limited access to systematic SEL resources, which left many feeling unprepared and uncertain about how to integrate SEL intentionally into their lessons. This discrepancy between teachers' positive attitude towards SEL and their resistiveness in actual practice suggests that while there is high theoretical buy-in, there is low implementation of behaviours due to low self-efficacy and a deficiency of professional support.

These findings are supported by Gkonou and Mercer's (2021) argument that emotion-sensitive pedagogy—while universally embraced as being beneficial—requires not only cognitive approval through awareness and belief in its effectiveness but also practical reinforcement through targeted training, clear instructional guidelines, and ongoing mentorship. Without these critical supports, even the most committed teachers struggle to translate SEL principles into daily, effective classroom practice, and thereby jeopardize the fulfilment of SEL's complete potential in ELT settings.

Cultural Sensitivities

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the data was the inherent challenge of developing emotional openness in a socio-cultural context that traditionally prizes restraint, humility, and indirectness of feelings. Teachers reported that students were inclined to exhibit reluctance to share personal feelings or to freely express emotions during classroom activities because such behaviors were perceived to be at odds with deeply ingrained cultural values of respecting privacy, humility, and emotional reserve. This cultural



orientation was a significant barrier to the wholesale implementation of SEL principles, particularly those requiring verbal articulation of emotions, group discussion of personal experiences, or public exhibition of empathy. For instance, activities like reflective journaling or role-playing situations common in Western SEL programs were met with discomfort or disdain because they ran counter to local notions of emotional demeanour.

These insights underscore the pressing need for culturally responsive SEL modifications that redefine emotional learning in terms amenable to community values. Rather than imposing universally derived models, effective SEL integration in these settings might demand indirect approaches, such as narrative-based learning through culturally relevant narratives (e.g., Islamic parables), non-verbal expression through artistic or textual production, or group problem-solving exercises aimed at community cohesion rather than individual insight. Such congruence with local norms not only heightens student receptivity but also ensures the applicability and viability of SEL. The study hence supports previous work by Lim et al. (2024) and Pentón Herrera (2020) that advocates SEL models honouring diversity through the emphasis on local social-emotional traditions and redefining "emotional competence" according to contextual views.

Institutional Support Required

One common thread throughout the study was constant mention by educators of systemic inadequacies in institutional support for SEL implementation. Common to all interviews was mention of a dearth of three critical resources: (1) officially approved, standardized SEL programs by education officials; (2) practical training workshops on pedagogical expertise in SEL integration; and (3) clear curriculum guidelines outlining how SEL competencies must be integrated into existing ELT frameworks. Without these underlying supports, teachers reported that they felt professionally isolated and were left to fall back on personal initiative to translate SEL concepts into organized classroom practice. This lack of formal direction resulted in several operational challenges: inconsistent implementation from classroom to classroom, ambiguity around the appropriate measures for assessing SEL outcomes, and widespread self-doubt around the effectiveness of their own teaching.

As one teacher succinctly described, "*We're supposed to teach emotional intelligence to students, but we receive no intelligence on how to actually do that.*" These findings are in line with the research of Brackett et al. (2012), whose large-scale study demonstrates that even sincere SEL efforts falter without district-level infrastructure, and Wicaksono & Saraswati (2024), who determine that "professional learning communities" are the most significant predictor of effective SEL implementation. This literature is extended in the current research by demonstrating how the absence of such supports within the Indonesian context produces especially acute challenges, including teacher burnout due to chronic improvisation and student disorientation due to unequal exposure to SEL practices. These results underscore the urgent need for educational policymakers to move beyond mere advocacy for SEL and instead commit to the concrete institutional scaffolding that enables its successful classroom translation.

Local Adaptations

Amidst the reported challenges in SEL implementation, a significant finding was teachers' innovative adaptation strategies. Across different school contexts, teachers demonstrated pedagogical creativity by embedding SEL principles within culturally congruent frameworks, particularly through Islamic moral teachings and Acehese local wisdom traditions. For example, some teachers taught emotional regulation using Qur'anic stories that highlight prophetic patience and self-control, while others introduced conflict



resolution through Acehnese folktales. These practices can be understood through the lens of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), which emphasizes the importance of sustaining learners' cultural and moral knowledge systems within formal education, as well as the concept of Funds of Knowledge, where community-based values and narratives serve as meaningful learning resources. Rather than merely serving as teaching strategies, these culturally grounded approaches represent an effort to recontextualize and decolonize SEL, which is often rooted in Western psychological frameworks that may not fully align with local belief systems. This syncretic cultural integration yielded three observable benefits: (1) substantially higher student engagement, with voluntary participation in SEL activities increasing from 42% to 78% in participating classrooms, (2) deeper conceptual internalization, as students began applying SEL principles beyond the classroom, and (3) stronger community acceptance, as parents recognized familiar cultural and religious values within school practices.

The success of these adaptations provides empirical support for the theoretical framework proposed by Ariza & Brown (2022), whereby SEL efficacy is maximized when "cultural capital is used as pedagogical capital." Interestingly, these findings extend beyond validation in illustrating the specific mechanisms through which cultural embedding works: (a) by reducing the "foreign concept" resistance that can attend Western-originated SEL initiatives, (b) through accessing culturally conditioned moral schemas that imbue emotional concepts with more personal relevance, and (c) through the authority conferred by locally esteemed knowledge systems. These results hold important implications for the international practice of SEL, suggesting that effective implementation in non-Western contexts involves more than superficial translation of materials - it involves what might be termed "pedagogical re-rooting," in which SEL principles are explicitly grafted onto indigenous cognitive and emotional structures. Potential future research directions may involve studies of how such an approach may be replicated systematically in other cultural contexts with fidelity to core SEL competencies.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for teacher professional development. Although teachers in Kota Langsa demonstrated high awareness of the value of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), their moderate classroom practices and the identified awareness-practice gap suggest that professional training is critical. Without targeted guidance, teachers often lack the confidence to translate their understanding of SEL into practice. This underscores the need for systematic training programs and mentorship opportunities that equip teachers with practical tools for integrating SEL into English language teaching. Prior research has similarly emphasized that teachers' competence in SEL is enhanced not by teaching experience alone but through structured professional development opportunities (Gimbert et al., 2023; Gueldner et al., 2020).

Another implication concerns the importance of cultural responsiveness in SEL implementation. Teachers' adaptations, such as incorporating Islamic narratives and local wisdom, demonstrate that SEL cannot be applied in a one-size-fits-all manner. Instead, SEL must be localized to align with cultural norms and values in order to be effective and sustainable. This supports the argument that SEL frameworks must be flexible and contextually embedded, rather than being imported wholesale from Western educational models (Huynh et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2024). Policymakers and curriculum developers should therefore design SEL modules that honor local traditions and integrate them with global competencies, ensuring that teachers and students find the content both meaningful and applicable.



Finally, the study highlights the need for institutional and policy-level support. Teachers in public schools, in particular, reported greater systemic barriers, such as rigid curricula and examination-driven environments, which restrict SEL integration. This suggests that institutional culture plays a decisive role in whether SEL becomes a meaningful part of classroom instruction. Educational policymakers should consider embedding SEL explicitly into curriculum guidelines, assessment frameworks, and school improvement plans, thereby legitimizing its place alongside linguistic and academic objectives. As Schonert-Reichl (2017) notes, sustainable SEL implementation depends not only on teacher willingness but also on systemic commitment. By aligning policy, training, and cultural responsiveness, the integration of SEL into ELT can foster both linguistic proficiency and emotional resilience among learners.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) by providing empirical evidence of Indonesian English teachers' perspectives and classroom practices in integrating SEL within ELT. The findings reveal a clear gap between teachers' strong awareness of SEL benefits and their more limited classroom implementation, highlighting the influence of institutional constraints, limited professional training, and culturally shaped expectations about emotional expression. These challenges were reported more strongly by public school teachers, indicating that systemic conditions play a crucial role in shaping SEL practices. At the same time, teachers demonstrated culturally responsive adaptations, particularly through the integration of Islamic moral teachings and local narratives, which made SEL more meaningful and acceptable within the Acehese sociocultural context.

In line with these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of localized pedagogical strategies and structured professional development to support teachers in translating SEL awareness into effective classroom practice. Training programs, curriculum integration support, and institutional encouragement are necessary to reduce the awareness–practice gap and ensure that SEL is implemented in ways that are both pedagogically sound and culturally relevant. By addressing both structural and cultural dimensions, SEL can become a sustainable component of English language teaching rather than remaining a conceptual ideal.

Recommendation

Several practical recommendations can be directed toward educational policymakers in Indonesia. First, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) should be systematically integrated into Teacher Professional Education (PPG) and in-service teacher training programs, ensuring that both pre-service and practicing teachers develop competencies in fostering students' emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills within ELT classrooms. Second, curriculum developers and textbook authors should consider revising ELT instructional materials to incorporate SEL-oriented activities and affective assessment rubrics, enabling teachers to evaluate not only linguistic achievement but also students' collaboration, emotional regulation, and respectful communication. Third, schools be provided with institutional support, including reduced curriculum overload and dedicated time for SEL-related classroom practices. Finally, policy frameworks should encourage culturally responsive SEL models that allow integration of local values, religious narratives, and community-based moral traditions, ensuring that SEL implementation aligns with Indonesia's diverse sociocultural contexts rather than relying solely on imported frameworks.



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