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IMPLEMENTATION OF SEL TECHNIQUES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM IN CHALLENGING TIMES

The article deals with the peculiarities of the implementation of SEL techniques in the EFL classroom in challenging times; the concept of “social-emotional learning” is specified; five core broad interrelated components of SEL competency are considered in detail: 1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, 4) relationship skills, 5) responsible decision-making; the types of activities characteristic for each of the components and applied from January to May 2023 at Practical Course of the English Language, Practical Grammar of the English Language classrooms are proposed and substantiated.

Social-emotional learning, which arose from the concept of emotional intelligence, is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL competency comprises five broad interrelated core components: self-awareness which includes identifying and recognizing emotions; accurate self-perception; recognizing strengths, needs, and values; self-management working on impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and discipline; goal setting and organizational skills; social awareness which deals with perspective-taking; empathy; difference recognition; respect for others; relationship skills concerning communication, social engagement, and relationship building; working cooperatively; negotiation, refusal, and conflict management; help-seeking; responsible decision-making which comprises problem identification and situation analysis; problem-solving; evaluation and reflection; personal, social, and ethical responsibility.

A range of activities substantiated in the article proved their efficiency during SEL implementation in EFL classrooms both for social-emotional support of the students in challenging times and for developing their communicative competence.

Key words: *social-emotional learning, competence, student, EFL classroom, technique, activity.*

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ВПРОВАДЖЕННЯ ТЕХНІК СЕЕН НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У СКЛАДНІ ЧАСИ

У статті розглядаються особливості впровадження технік СЕЕН на заняттях з англійської мови у складні часи; уточнено поняття «соціально-емоційне та етичне навчання»; детально розглянуто п'ять основних взаємопов'язаних компонентів СЕЕН компетентності: 1) самосвідомість, 2) самоуправління, 3) соціальна обізнаність, 4) навички налагоджування стосунків, 5) відповідальне прийняття рішень; запропоновано та обґрунтовано види завдань, характерних для кожного з компонентів, що було застосовано з січня по травень 2023 року на заняттях з «Практичного курсу англійської мови», «Практичної граматики англійської мови».

Соціально-емоційне та етичне навчання, що базується на концепції емоційного інтелекту, є процесом, за допомогою якого всі молоді люди та дорослі набувають і застосовують знання, навички та ставлення для розвитку здорової особистості, керування емоціями та досягнення особистих і колективних цілей, прояву емпатії, встановлення та підтримки стосунків та прийняття відповідальних рішень.

СЕЕН компетентність складається з п'яти основних взаємопов'язаних компонентів: самосвідомість, що включає ідентифікацію та розпізнавання емоцій; самосприйняття; визнання сильних сторін, потреб і цінностей; самоуправління, пов'язане із контролем імпульсів і керуванням стресом; самомотивацією та дисциплінованістю; цілепокладанням та організаторськими здібностями; соціальна обізнаність, що має на меті розвиток емпатії;

розпізнавання відмінностей; повагу до інших; навички спілкування, соціальної взаємодії та побудови стосунків; навички налагоджування стосунків, що передбачають управління конфліктами та звернення за допомогою; відповідальне прийняття рішень, що включає визначення проблеми та аналіз ситуації; вирішення проблеми; оцінку та рефлексію; особисту, соціальну та етичну відповідальність.

Завдання, запропоновані та обґрунтовані у статті, довели свою ефективність під час впровадження СЕЕН на заняттях з англійської мови як для соціально-емоційної підтримки студентів у складні часи, так і для розвитку їхньої комунікативної компетентності.

Ключові слова: соціально-емоційне та етичне навчання, компетентність, студент, англійська мова, техніка, завдання.

Problem Statement. Emotions and their role in an individual's development and success have been underestimated for a long time. However, modern advancements in psychology and methodology prove the necessity to get deeper into the research on students' social and emotional skills and competencies in the EFL classroom to achieve high academic results as well as provide their well-being, a safe learning environment, and holistic development, particularly in challenging times.

Research Analysis. The issue of implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) techniques in the classroom was first regarded in the 1960-s by Dr. James Comer who put his ideas about supporting the "whole child" into practice at two schools in Connecticut, which led to a decline in behavior challenges and exceeded the national average in academic performance. About 25 years afterwards a collaboration of researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates led by Timothy Shriver and Dr. Roger P. Weissberg succeeded in proving that schools must attend to all children's social and emotional needs.

Nowadays SEL strategies are being researched and implemented in the teaching process by a number of educators, practitioners, and psychologists all over the world. The most recognized achievements in the field have been accomplished by D. Goleman, E. Rockefeller Growald, M. T. Greenberg, M. U. O'Brien, J. E. Zins, L. Fredericks, M. C. Wang, H. J. Walberg, J. A. Durlak, R. D. Taylor, A. B. Dymnicki, C. Domitrovich, B. Bumbarger, C. M. Kam, C. T. Walls, J. W. Payton, P. Graczyk, D. Wardlaw, M. Bloodworth, C. Tompsett who have worked out the theoretical basis for SEL application at school of different levels and drawn parallels between the instruction based on social-emotional component, students' emotional intelligence and their high academic performance.

In Ukraine, SEL practices have not enjoyed popularity until the reform of "The New Ukrainian School" (2018) and the wartime period, which has brought huge changes to the smooth process of teaching and learning. Thus, one of the biggest challenges facing the educational system in Ukraine today is how to teach while supporting and revealing students' talents

and uniqueness, highlighting the optimistic view on the future and simultaneously developing communicative skills in the EFL classroom to achieve learning objectives. However, the problem and specificity of SEL strategies implementation in the EFL classroom has not been profoundly researched yet.

Purpose of the Article. Consequently, the aim of the article is to research and theoretically justify SEL implementation as an integral part of education and human development in the EFL classroom in challenging times.

Presentation of the Basic Material. The idea of SEL application in the teaching process arose from the concept of emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ) which was first introduced in 1964 but gained popularity in with the book "Emotional Intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ" by Daniel Goleman who defined EQ as "the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions" (Goleman, 2005). Immediately Goleman's ideas about the importance of emotional quotient for achieving success in any field split the world of science into two groups, one of which suggested that emotional intelligence can be learned and strengthened, while others claimed it is an inborn characteristic. Following the former hypothesis educators all over the globe have put a lot of effort into developing detailed frameworks for the implementation of SEL strategies in the teaching process with a special focus on vulnerable learners to make their learning curve less traumatizing and more beneficial for both their school achievements and harmonious wellbeing.

The EFL classroom is perfect for SEL application as learning a foreign language for many students going through hard times such as wartime, seeking asylum, displacement, relocation, etc. is a particularly challenging and simultaneously vital experience. To make this way smooth and successful student-centered approach with special attention to a personality, their interests, emotions, unique features, and holistic development is reflected in the implementation of social-emotional learning.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, SEL is "the process through which all young people and adults acquire

and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2021).

According to the definition, social-emotional learning strategies in the EFL classroom possess binary value: contribute to students’ formation of social and emotional competency and facilitate the qualitative formation and development of their communicative competence. In the research which was held at Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University, we focused on the strategies and techniques which give an advantage to both.

In the experimental work, the five broad interrelated core components of SEL competency defined by CASEL (2017) following the ideas of D. Goleman (Goleman, 1998) were taken into account:

- self-awareness: identifying and recognizing emotions; accurate self-perception; recognizing strengths, needs, and values;
- self-management: impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and discipline; goal setting and organizational skills;
- social awareness: perspective-taking; empathy; difference recognition; respect for others;
- relationship skills: communication, social engagement, and relationship building; working cooperatively; negotiation, refusal, and conflict management; help-seeking;
- responsible decision-making: problem identification and situation analysis; problem-solving; evaluation and reflection; personal, social, and ethical responsibility.

From January to May 2023 62 pre-service English teachers were exposed to a variety of ESL strategies in Practical Course of the English Language, Practical Grammar of the English Language, and Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages classrooms. A variety of forms were integrated into different aspects of teaching and learning.

Taking into account the safety of students, classes were held online throughout the whole period, which, on the one hand, deprived the process of education of face-to-face communication and relations – such crucial issues for SEL implementation. However, on the other hand, gave an abundance of opportunities to make use of the variety of technical resources available for online classrooms.

Working with the emotionally traumatized students my first concern was to build up their self-awareness – to teach them to identify and recognize emotions, their strengths, needs, and values. For this

purpose, a range of techniques was used, the most workable of which proved to be regular journal writing which was based on sharing students’ experiences at the beginning and the progress of the war. A subsequent summary of their thoughts led to a few generalizations of their feelings and emotions. Thus, at the beginning of the war, they all tended to express either denial or lack of understanding of the events around, which was followed by profound fear, confusion, and hatred. As a result, negative thoughts about the situation itself and them personally occupied their minds. Encouraged to share some of their ideas in the classroom, they started to understand that the feelings they had were not unique or shameful, which led to understanding themselves and accepting the events as they were.

To manage their stress and anxiety brief mindfulness and breathing practices, relaxation exercises were incorporated into each practical session. Moreover, classical music at the beginning and end of a class during the reflection stage helped to achieve my goal to create an atmosphere of ease, comfort, and sedation, which greatly contributed to the students’ sincerity, well-being and enabled them to speak on a variety of topics.

The next step was to work on their self-management skills which deal with impulse control and stress management, self-motivation and discipline, goal setting and organizational skills. This component of SEL was conducted via social media networks, online platforms and a variety of technical resources supporting online teaching process in wartime like Jamboard, Kahoot, Padlet, Pear Deck, Quizlet, Socrates, etc. To manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations achieve they were suggested to participate in such activities as “Parachute Opening Ritual” that all social-emotional learning sessions should start and finish with, “Rose, Thorn, and Bud” offering them to reflect on their success, challenges, and potential, “Visualize the Future” when students imagine what is possible for them in the future, and set tangible goals and plan action steps to make their visualization more realistic, “Deep Breaths” when students practice breathing in through their nose for four beats, holding their breath for four beats, then breathing out through their mouth for four beats, which helps to calm down or become more present.

All of these resources allowed students to express themselves in a range of ways, gave a unique chance to be creative, self-organized, and critical. They did build a community, group collaboration outside the classroom revealing the talents and specific features of each member of the team. They enhanced healthy

relationships and enabled students to feel valued and respected identifying and responding to both their own emotions and feelings of others.

The SEL component of social awareness, which comprises perspective-taking, empathy, difference recognition, and respect for others, was realized through a variety of activities both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, the techniques of “Not in Common”, “How Are You Feeling on an Animal Scale”, “Found Word Poetry”, the icebreaker “Hope and Fears”, “Alliteration from the Heart” proved to be of extreme importance and success for supporting the students’ self-esteem, bringing back the hope for the future, conquering fears and phobias, enhancing their compassion, empathy and mutual understanding. Building up a pair, a mini-group and growing into a group of like-minded people connected by a common goal, aspirations, interests and aims worked well for their social awareness and appreciation both themselves individually and themselves as a valuable part of the community.

One of the activities to fulfill the social-emotional pedagogical function and develop the students’ communicative competence was “How Are You Feeling on an Animal Scale”. At first glance, it seemed simple, funny, and relaxing. However, skillfully applied, following the principles of differentiated instruction, it revealed its potential to the full. While weaker (approaching) students got the task to choose the picture which corresponded to their mood and current emotions, their above-the-level group mates were encouraged to name the depicted feelings and further elaborate on their choice and reflect on the reasons behind them. As a result, everyone felt involved, enthusiastic and motivated to speak, analyze and reflect using the target language and supporting the dialogue flow.

The teaching process was held continuously outside the classroom as well. Having been encouraged to keep a journal and complete Jamboards on different issues made the process of achieving a high level of the students’ self-awareness natural and creative. Completion of the Jamboards “The Map of Ukraine”, “My Goals by the End of the Term”, “Practical Session Reflection”, etc. allowed each of them to equally contribute, reveal creativity and enjoy the common outcome.

Developing relationship skills inside the group, which include communication, social engagement, and relationship building; working cooperatively, negotiation, refusal, and conflict management as well as help-seeking is an integral part of SEL. This also includes the capacity to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate and collaborate to problem solve,

navigate settings with different cultural norms, and seek or offer help when needed.

How to benefit from both these skills development and foreign language communicative competence formation in the EFL classroom. Organization of “Community Building Circles” where the students practiced communication skills and got to know different perspectives through conversations about such topics as current or historical events, book plots, their attitudes, past experience, and future ambitions as well as the creation of a positive and inclusive environment was the key to success.

It is worth mentioning that there is a paradox between the collectivist culture Ukrainians belong to as a nation and their unwillingness to participate in teamwork, share responsibilities, and contribute to the common goal. In studies and work we give preference to individual projects and tasks. In addition, pandemic restrictions on FTF communication and the wartime online teaching process didn’t contribute to my students’ eagerness to work as a team and feel part of the community. Consequently, one of the greatest challenges I encountered was creating a favorable atmosphere for building up a community with strong connections and developing relationship skills inside the group. Surprisingly, the most effective method to achieve my goal proved to be drama techniques implementation.

One of the vital students’ competencies SEL has the potential to develop is responsible decision-making, i.e. problem identification and situation analysis; problem-solving; evaluation and reflection; the ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations; the capacity to consider ethical standards and safety concerns and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being. The most effective activities to achieve these objectives were “At the Crossroads”, “Pros and Cons” when the students considered the potential positive and negative outcomes of certain choices, “What’s My Role?” participating in which the students analyzed their role and responsibilities in the family or a particular community in order to recognize how their positive and negative choices can affect others.

Conclusion. Taking all the above-mentioned into consideration, it must be highlighted that SEL techniques proved to be a powerful tool and an integral part of the teaching process in EFL classroom in challenging times. On the one hand, their implementation enhanced students’ abilities to understand and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, make responsible decisions, feel a part of a community. On

the other hand, their diversity and communicative core provided the students with the opportunity to successfully develop their linguistic skills and motivated them to language learning.

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