

Infused Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills in Oral Communication Tasks

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the social-emotional learning skills infused in the oral communication tasks utilized in a Chinese Senior High school in Baguio City, Philippines. Through the use of qualitative descriptive research design and the rigorous process of document analysis, the researcher found out that the activities, tasks, and the whole curriculum in oral communication of the selected locale of the study highlight *responsible decision-making* to be the most evident hence prioritized SEL skill being developed in the said subject followed by *relationship skills, social awareness, self-management, and self-awareness* respectively based on the frequency of occurrences of these in said activities. Thus, it can be agreed based on the result that *responsible decision-making* has been focused predominantly on the activities used to develop skills concerning problem-solving and analyzing which are essential for students to be competitive in the 21st century. It can also be deducted that the curriculum of the said locale of the study should further include other SEL skills primarily highlighting social awareness and relationship skills, as they were perceived to be essential in oral communication.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); responsible decision-making; oral communication; social awareness; relationship skills.

INTRODUCTION

Social and emotional learning (hereafter SEL) constitutes a crucial aspect of education and human development encompassing the acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Howard & Ferrari, 2022; Adams & Richie, 2017). SEL nurtures healthy identities, emotional regulation, goal achievement, empathy, supportive relationships, and responsible decision-making. In the Philippines, SEL has

recently gained traction, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This period witnessed an increase in webinars and professional development programs focusing on student and teacher well-being and mental health. Additionally, there has been a prioritization of continuously improving teachers' instructional practices, such as module creation, technology integration, and syllabus development, to address the needs of students profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Many of these initiatives advocate for the integration of SEL into teaching materials.

To put it in perspective, SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community relationships to support learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. An effective strategy for getting students to open up to and invest in their education is to include social and emotional learning (SEL) in classroom activities (Taplin, 2021). According to Casel (2020), whose mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool to high school, students need "regular opportunities to acquire, train, and deliberate on social and emotional competencies in ways that are developmentally relevant and culturally responsive." Kaspar & Massey (2023) stress that social-emotional learning has the power to change how educators deliver instruction across the country. Teaching students, the rationale behind SEL material is just as important as teaching them the material itself (Alvarez, 2020). Meaningful and effective SEL requires teachers to explain the rationale behind their pedagogical choices, such as using check-ins, pairing up students, and exploring alternative problem-solving approaches.

The integration of SEL into classroom instruction should be explicit. Surveys conducted during webinars, as reported by Rockwood (2021) revealed that many participating teachers have limited knowledge and familiarity with infusing SEL into their instructional practices. While some teachers may unintentionally incorporate SEL elements into their materials, SEL proponents argue for deliberate and intentional teaching of SEL skills to target both soft skills and content (Casel, 2022).

Given that SEL integration applies across all disciplines, teaching oral communication stands out as a specific area that can enhance students' confidence in using language authentically. Du's (2009) study underscores that students actively engage in communication tasks when motivated and confident, indicating that integrating SEL into oral communication instruction could yield positive learning outcomes. To achieve this, teachers of oral communication should employ pedagogical approaches that enhance both communication skills and SEL competencies.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify SEL skills embedded within oral communication tasks in Senior High School (Chinese School in the Philippines), specifically addressing the following question: What SEL skills are integrated into oral communication tasks?

METHOD

This study used qualitative descriptive research which focuses on understanding a phenomenon by examining its characteristics and qualities; moreover, it involves the collection and data analysis in the form of words, images, or non-numerical forms of information (Regoniel, 2023). Particularly, this paper used this method to examine the instructional materials used in oral communication. Instructional materials are "devices through which knowledge, skills, attitude, ideas, beliefs, and

values get transmitted to the learner by the teacher to ease the teaching-learning process.” (Awolaju, 2016, p.705). These include textual, audio, visual, and interactive media materials (Learnbrite, 2023).

Hence, data collection focuses on tasks, activities, and evaluation materials used in the subject of *Oral Communication in the Context* of one Chinese Senior High School in Baguio City, Philippines, that engage students in meaningful language learning in oral communication. These include teacher-made materials such as lesson plans and instructional videos, all utilized during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024. Content analysis was guided by researcher-constructed matrices, enabling the categorization of data based on predetermined criteria.

The study involves several steps, including securing ethical approval, obtaining permission from the school, and collecting instructional materials. Tasks and activities relevant to oral communication are extracted from these materials and subjected to content analysis. The process includes manual coding by the researcher and validation through triangulation with expert coders.

To identify the infused SEL skills and the pedagogical approaches used in integrating these skills, content analysis was used to treat the data. This research technique makes “replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). According to Bengtsson (2016), studies using this type of analysis use words and themes in the presentation and interpretation of data, and to obtain the objective of the study, the following stages of analytic procedure were followed.

Coding Scheme

Before the coding process, a coding scheme or coding list was used as a guide in breaking down the texts or data (i.e. tasks) into units of meanings, codes and categories. Since the coding approach can either be inductive or deductive (Doyle, et al., 2020), this study utilized the deductive approach in which the codes or categories are already predetermined (Bengtsson, 2016). These codes or categories are based on the central questions of the research and concepts namely: most essential learning competencies in oral communication, SEL core skills, and pedagogical approaches in the K to 12 curriculum. Having these codes or categories generated deductively from the aim of the study as well as the concepts and theories in the coding process is much easier for the researcher to obtain high reliability than inductively (Catanzaro, 1988 as cited in Bengtsson, 2016).

The categories in the coding list used to identify the infused SEL skills are defined as follows:

- 1) students’ Roles in the Tasks: descriptions of the student’s responsibilities in the given tasks (e.g. taking down notes, memorizing the speech, etc.);
- 2) expected Enhanced Skills (sub-category): skills that are reinforced when students do those roles or responsibilities (e.g. attention to details, mastery of details, etc.);
- 3) enhanced Skills/Sub skills (general category): capacities or abilities under each SEL core skill (e.g. organizational skills, self-discipline, etc.); and
- 4) SL Core Skills (main category): identified 5 core competencies under social-emotional learning (e.g. self-management, social awareness, self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making).

For the second problem, the coding is to be used to determine what method is used in integrating these SEL skills, there are:

- 1) output or Expected Outcome;
- 2) actions/Steps to Achieve the Outcome;
- 3) Ttype of Activity or Strategy (general category); and
- 4) approach or Method (main category).

Before the coding process, the researcher did a test analysis of three randomly picked tasks from the list to assess the effectiveness of the coding scheme. This process is essential to determine the coding scheme's weaknesses before the coding process.

Coding Process

When the coding scheme was finalized, a manual coding process was done by the researcher using the two matrices which are already in Google Docs. In this stage, the researcher familiarizes himself with the data or the listed tasks to break these down into smaller meaning units which are the students' roles and assign these units with codes to facilitate identification of concepts (Bengtsson, 2016). The directions or instructions for each task are analyzed and are written in phrases or sentences that contain aspects related to each other to answer the questions raised in the objective of the study. Thus, to lead to the subcategories and final categories which refer to the identification of SEL sub and core skills, the students' roles and expected enhanced skills inferred from the instructions of the tasks are considered. Similarly, to determine the strategies and the methods used in integrating SEL skills, the process and the expected output for each task are described.

When meaning units are identified, the researcher checks the aspects of these contents if they have been covered about the aim (Burnard, 1991). To achieve this, the coding process should be repeated to help the researcher identify the meaning units to be kept or discarded (Bengtsson, 2016). Hence, the instructions and directions of each task were reread alongside these units, codes, and categories to distinguish if these units give answers to the research questions.

To ensure the validity of the codes, there were two coders (Burnard, 1991) who were experts with whom the researcher shared the Google Docs containing the data and the results for their evaluation. Before their evaluation is an orientation about the study and the coding process. Since both the co-coders and the researcher have access to Google Docs, this strategy is more convenient for editing, commenting, and reviewing the inputs made. After the assessment and review of these codes, the researcher proceeded to the compilation of the results.

Reporting the Results

Once the categories were finalized, frequency counts were utilized to analyze and present the findings. The summary of subcategories and main categories (i.e. SEL skills and pedagogical methods or approaches) was presented through a table showing the most recurrent SEL skills and methods used in integrating these skills into the least recurrent. Quantification like counting the subcategories and main categories that emerged in the coding process can be applied as additional information (Bengtsson, 2016). Using a quantification approach combined with qualitative analysis shows clearly the magnitude of each examined phenomenon (Berg, 2001; Morgan, 1993 as cited in Bengtsson, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines the results uncovered in this study, focusing on the research questions and objectives that were initially formulated. It primarily discusses the infused SEL skills in oral communication tasks.

Thus, to particularly answer the stipulated research question, the researcher underwent a rigorous coding process where all the tasks, activities, and evaluation materials that engage the students in meaningful language learning in oral communication were collected. After the raw data collection, the researcher proceeded with the content analysis where matrices patterned from the study of Domingo (2021) were used.

Correlatively since this study also aims to improve student motivation in language acquisition, whereas social-emotional learning plays a pivotal role in improving students' motivation, a discussion of SEL's implication to students' learning was also included. As found in the study of Asrifan, et al., 2023 and Muthmainnah, et al., 2022, highly motivated students were more likely to perform better in language acquisition. Which indeed has a significant effect on students' social-emotional learning capabilities in classes.

This is substantially significant to discuss as the current language learners, especially those who have been part of this study have been on the receiving end of the world education's decline from COVID-19 (Pratama & Dewi, 2022).

Infused SEL Skills in Oral Communication Tasks

The following results answer the research question of the present study wherein it seeks to identify the SEL skills infused in the oral communication tasks and activities used and delivered by the teachers of the selected locale of the study. The researcher collated materials and performed a thematic analysis of all the materials used. The themes are then ranked based on their frequency of use in the following materials for activities.

As shown in Table 1, the five (5) SEL Core Competencies were ranked from the most observable SEL skills/competencies in the textbook, PPT, and teaching guides used by Filipino teachers in one Chinese school in Baguio City, Philippines. The top SEL skill is Responsible Decision-Making then followed by Relationship Skills. Third is Social Awareness. Then, the last two are Self-Management and Self-Awareness.

Table 1 SEL skills infused in Oral Communication tasks

Social-Emotional Skills	Frequency	Rank
Responsible Decision Making	30	1
Relationship Skills	14	2
Social Awareness	11	3
Self-Management	9	4
Self-Awareness	8	5

Responsible Decision-Making Skill

Observably, Responsible Decision Making was ranked the highest and consequently, the most observable SEL skill in the activities provided by the teachers. This can be assumed as most of the tasks highlight the development of students' Enhanced skills/Sub-skills such as Analyzing situations, Problem-solving, Leadership, and Imagination/ Critical thinking in most of the activities or tasks given to the students.

Responsible decision-making is a crucial SEL skill that encompasses the ability to make thoughtful, ethical choices that contribute positively to personal well-being and the welfare of others (Moore & Gregory, 2024). It involves considering the consequences of one's actions and evaluating potential outcomes before making a decision. This skill requires individuals to reflect on their values, beliefs, and the impact of their choices on themselves and the broader community.

Most of the activities that require students to analyze situations are found in "Reflect-Upon" activities where the teachers implement these as pre-discussion activities and processing. For example, students are prompted by questions that ask them how to react (non-verbal) and what to say (verbal) in a certain scenario by which their supposed behaviours and answers are dependent on how the students think the other person will understand them. Other specific examples that highlight Responsible decision-making as the common SEL skill observable in the activities are: role plays, examining the given scenario and identifying which elements of communication, reporting, or speech presentations, essays with guide questions, and prompt phrases. Having Responsible decision-making as the highest implies that the teachers focused on the development of the students' resilience in navigating complex situations, managing conflicts effectively, and demonstrating self-control and impulse regulation which are essential considering that these skills are what is also required in the 21st century market.

Responsible decision-making cultivates a sense of accountability to the students, as they take ownership of their actions and accept the consequences, whether positive or negative. Ultimately, the presence of Responsible decision-making as the most dominant SEL skill in the activities and tasks done by the students in the classroom seems promising to all Chinese learners in the selected local as it equips them with the skills necessary to navigate ethical dilemmas, builds healthy relationships, and contribute positively to society, especially that they are in a foreign place – the Philippines which is popularly known for its dense cultural diversity. Surprisingly, the activities or tasks used by the teachers are not particularly designed or mirrored from the Chinese curriculum and are widely based on the Filipino curriculum of learners with the exception, of course of the language being used and the dominant subjects being taught.

Relationship Skill

The highlighting of Relationship skills in an oral communication class is as much important among students especially if the students are from foreign places studying in a foreign country. These skills not only enable students to build strong connections with peers, teachers, and mentors but also serve as a foundation for future personal and professional relationships. Students who possess strong relationship skills are better equipped to collaborate effectively, resolve conflicts peacefully, and communicate their thoughts and feelings empathetically (Denham & Brown, 2010). Table 1 shows that fourteen (14) common activities or tasks given by the teachers to the students in an oral communication class aimed to improve students' Relationship skills including skills in communication, social engagement, and building relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

The activities that highlight these skills include the use of impromptu speeches, formative assessments which include guide questions, and essay activities. These activities aimed to develop effective communication with students practising their ability to connect or relate to their classmates' sharing and enhance their non-verbal and verbal skills which allow the students to effectively express themselves.

It can be deduced from the results of the tallied activities that the teachers who have used the following activities focused on the development of the interpersonal skills of the students which can also be considered as one of the important skills that foreign students must learn upon venturing in the 21st-century market (Pincham & McTague, 2021). In addition, it can also be implied that relationship skills allow students to build better networks for their future academic and professional success hence the stern focus on it (Montroy et al., 2014).

Social Awareness Skill

Social Awareness was regarded as the third most important skill among the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) abilities emphasized in the activities conducted by teachers in the oral communication classes of the chosen study location. The activities such as reflect-upon, role-plays, and prompt phrases have demonstrated social awareness through the display of empathy, social engagement, cooperative learning, perspective-taking, sensitivity, and comprehension of social and ethical norms of behaviour.

The presence of social awareness in an oral communication class has important consequences, as it fosters a dynamic learning environment. The teachers likely aimed to foster empathy and respect among students, prompting them to acknowledge and value varied perspectives, backgrounds, and communication styles. This explains the concentration on activities related to these concepts (Denham & Brown, 2010). This understanding establishes the foundation for proficient interpersonal communication, as students acquire the skills to engage in conversations with sensitivity and inclusivity.

Incorporating social awareness as a component of social-emotional learning (SEL) in the oral communication class prompts students to analyze society standards in a thoughtful and discerning manner. This increased consciousness provides them with the necessary skills to communicate ethically and responsibly.

Integrating social consciousness into an oral communication course not only improves individual communication abilities but also fosters a climate of regard, compassion, and inclusiveness. This method equips students to effectively negotiate the complexity of communication in the interconnected and diversified market of the 21st century by highlighting the significance of comprehending and appreciating diverse perspectives (Pincham and McTague, 2021).

Self-Management Skill

Self-management as a social-emotional learning (SEL) skill refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations (Dusenbury et al., 2020). It can be gleaned from Table 1 that Self-management was ranked second to last among all the SEL skills observed in the activities used by oral communication teachers in the selected locale of the study. These activities were presentations, speeches, and writing essays, which are common to other SEL skills.

Meanwhile, Organizational skills, Goal-setting, Time management, and Stress management/ Impulse control were primarily observed in the activities hence the categorization under Self-management. This suggests that the given activities have the least focus on the development of students' capability to control themselves in tough situations, which is what the 21st-century market also possesses – pressure and fast-paced production (Pincham & McTague, 2021).

Self-Awareness Skill

Unexpectedly, Self-awareness was ranked the least among the SEL skills. It can also be gleaned from the table that the sub-skills enhanced in the activities were self-perception, recognition of one's self, identifying emotions, accurate self-assessment of strengths and challenges, confidence, and labelling one's feelings. These activities were reflect-upon, essay writing, and modular activities which are commonly writing activities. This is inarguably correlative to the study of Hughes et al., (2019) as they noted the distinctive effect of journaling (a writing activity) in the development of students' self-awareness.

However, since the development of these skills enhances the ability of the student to recognize and understand one's own emotions, thoughts, values, strengths, and weaknesses, which supposedly should receive a greater focus in an oral communication class, negative implications can be drawn from this result. One is that self-awareness also includes confidence building which is an important skill that needs to be developed for foreign students. Needless to say, in any conversation this subskill of SEL is indeed vital for the other SEL skills to be practised.

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding discussions of the study's results and findings, it is clear that the teachers placed a high value on the development of the student's oral communication skills by emphasizing the importance of analyzing situations, critical analysis, and problem-solving. It can also be concluded that the teachers' preference for providing activities that are primarily classified as responsible decision-making as an SEL skill indicates that the students were perceived to require reinforcement in the same areas as stated to build oral communication competency. Given this, it is reasonable to assume that responsible decision-making, as a SEL skill, is an essential component of 21st-century skills. These essential skills not only provide students with the tools they need to navigate an increasingly competitive 21st-century market, but they also foster valuable characteristics like independence, confidence, and a sense of responsibility.

As students progress to tertiary education, where they are prepared for professional careers, these skills become even more important. By honing their ability to make informed, ethical decisions, students lay a solid foundation for success in their chosen fields. With all of the teachers' efforts, it is reasonable to assume that prioritizing responsible decision-making not only prepares students in the chosen study location to become competent professionals but also instils in them the values required to positively contribute to society through oral communication.

However, since Oral Communication in Context serves as a pivotal course offering senior high school students a platform to actively engage with the target language within authentic learning settings, it becomes imperative for oral communication instructors to craft activities and tasks that further foster the other SEL skills, especially social awareness and relationship skills, because these two SEL skills are similarly comparable in terms of importance to reBy carefully incorporating such elements - referring to the SEL skills highlighted in this study - into the curriculum, educators can not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also encourage students to navigate real-world interactions with empathy, cultural sensitivity, and effective communication, thus equipping them with indispensable life skills beyond mere language acquisition.

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