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SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN CRISIS TIMES

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Abstract
This qualitative case study deals with the problem of social-emotional learning (SEL) implementation in Ukrainian pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' formative assessment in the English language classroom. The research question is "How did the implementation of SEL techniques during formative assessment affect pre-service EFL teachers' communicative skills?" It is particularly important in times of crisis, such as wars, natural disasters, or pandemics, when pre-service EFL teachers are socially and emotionally vulnerable. Taking into account that the assessment provokes additional stress and anxiety, the introduction of SEL techniques in formative assessment contributes to creating a fertile educational space with a focus on pre-service teachers' emotional needs and mental well-being. The study found that integrating SEL techniques such as exit tickets, reading logs, dialogue journals, pilgrim's journals, assessment rubrics, reflective activities, and graphic organizers into formative assessments significantly enhanced pre-service EFL teachers' communicative skills, emotional intelligence, and learner autonomy. Participants reported improved engagement, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, confirming the value of SEL-informed pedagogy in fostering both language proficiency and emotional resilience in times of crisis.

Keywords: formative assessment, informal interview, pre-service EFL teacher, SEL technique, social-emotional learning

Introduction
Present-day educators have to face numerous challenges on a regular basis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-initiated war, remote online

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learning has been the only viable form of instruction for university undergraduates throughout Ukraine for the past three years. This has led to new ideas about how to make learning advantageous for the needs and demands of students. Consequently, it has become clear that traditional, in-person methods and techniques have to be transformed, modified, or replaced by new innovative approaches to support effective teaching and learning online (Singh et al., 2021). In addition to this, the hardships experienced by Ukrainian students and educators have increased the constant search for ways and means to ease the ever-present pressure, eliminate negative feelings and effects of the war on our country, and simultaneously develop key competencies that will support the (re)building of a healthy community (UNESCO, 2024).

One such approach that has gained traction in Ukrainian higher education is social-emotional learning (SEL). It is a framework designed to cultivate core social and emotional competencies in students, also called CASEL 5 (CASEL, 2020). They include self-awareness (recognizing one's emotions, thoughts, and values and understanding their impact on behavior in various contexts); self-management (the skills needed to effectively control one's emotions, thoughts, and actions in different situations to achieve personal goals and aspirations); social awareness (the skill of comprehending the viewpoints of others and showing empathy, including those from different backgrounds, cultures, and contexts); relationship skills (the capacity to form and sustain healthy, supportive relationships and to interact effectively with a diverse range of individuals and groups); and responsible decision-making (the ability to make thoughtful, caring choices regarding personal behavior and social interactions in a variety of situations).

Research suggests that integrating SEL into instructional practices enhances not only students' emotional well-being but also their academic performance (Mahoney et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2024). In the context of foreign language education, SEL-informed strategies have been increasingly applied to formative assessment practices to create a supportive learning environment (Dmitrenko et al., 2024; Panchenko, 2023). Formative assessment, understood in this study as an ongoing, process-oriented method of evaluating student learning, enables instructors to gather real-time insights into students' progress. It helps educators adjust their teaching strategies and provide timely, individualized support. Given that assessment provokes additional stress and anxiety in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Derakhshan et al., 2024; Su & Lee, 2024), integrating SEL principles into formative assessment offers a means to alleviate negative emotions and foster a more positive and productive learning experience. In particular, SEL-based formative assessment incorporates reflective practices, peer interactions, and constructive teacher feedback, all of which contribute to both academic success and socio-emotional development (Cefai et al., 2021; Dmitrenko & Budas, 2021).

Despite the growing body of research on SEL and formative assessment, there remains a gap in understanding how these two frameworks function in crisis-affected educational contexts. While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of SEL in general classroom settings (Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Weissberg et al., 2020), there is limited empirical evidence on its specific role in formative assessment for pre-service EFL teachers, particularly in prolonged emergency

situations. Furthermore, although formative assessment is widely recognized as a tool that promotes self-regulated learning and engagement (Ferreira et al., 2020), research on its adaptation to the emotional and psychological needs of students during wartime remains scarce.

Thus, the present qualitative case study aims to explore the impact of SEL-integrated formative assessment on pre-service EFL teachers in Ukraine during the ongoing crisis. Specifically, this study seeks to examine how SEL-informed assessment practices influence students' learning experiences, particularly in the context of English communicative skills development, and engagement in an online environment. In doing so, we contribute to bridging the gap in existing literature by offering insights into how formative assessment can serve as both an academic and emotional support mechanism in challenging educational circumstances. Throughout our manuscript, we use 'instructor' to refer to university professors, and 'pre-service EFL teachers' to refer to participants. In the Findings section, participants are referred to as Respondents and instructors as Experts to ensure anonymity.

Literature Review

Emotional intelligence, social-emotional learning, and their role in education

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions in themselves and others, facilitating social interactions and decision-making (Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2016). SEL, in turn, is an educational framework that fosters EI development by enhancing self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). The integration of SEL into educational settings has been linked to improved academic outcomes, social behaviour, and mental well-being (Mahoney et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

The theoretical foundations of SEL stem from EI research, particularly Goleman's (1995) work on emotional intelligence and its application in education. Over time, SEL frameworks such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) and the Clover Model (Noam & Triggs, 2023) have provided structured approaches to embedding SEL in classrooms. These frameworks emphasize that the cultivation of SEL skills benefits students both academically and emotionally, promoting resilience and adaptive learning strategies.

Studies exploring the influence of EI on language learners (Dewaele et al., 2008; Shao et al., 2013; Wang & Liu, 2023) have proved that students with higher levels of EI experience less anxiety and stress in foreign language classrooms and acquire higher levels of communicative skills. Similarly, researchers (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Shahivand & Moradkhani, 2019) have shown that language teachers with higher levels of emotional intelligence "are more empathetic toward their students' needs – including social-emotional needs – and are capable of deploying techniques that improve their and their students' well-being" (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2022, p. 14). Additionally, SEL has been found to play a crucial role in long-term academic and life success, including improved mental well-being, career readiness, and active community engagement (Bai et al., 2021; Devitska, 2023; Korol, 2024; Mahoney et al., 2021; Saliuk & Shkola, 2023; Williford & Wolcott, 2015).

SEL and emotional well-being in language education

The emotional well-being of both students and teachers is fundamental to the effectiveness of foreign language education. Emotional well-being refers to an individual's ability to manage emotions, sustain motivation, and develop resilience in learning environments (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Within EFL learning, the self-concept – how learners perceive their competencies and progress – significantly influences their emotional and academic experiences (Mercer, 2012; Yoshida, 2017). Research has shown that negative emotions like anxiety, boredom, and depression can negatively impact foreign language learning. Conversely, environments that are emotionally positive enhance student learning since emotions such as enjoyment, comfort, and pride, along with imagination, facilitate easier problem-solving (Dewaele et al., 2018; Fernández-García & Fonseca-Mora, 2019).

Publications by Humphries (2020), Mercer and Gregersen (2020) have finalized that language teachers often experience emotional regret and inadequate emotional reactions connected to not receiving knowledge about these topics in language teacher preparation programs. The necessity for implementing practices that acknowledge the criticality of social-emotional development in language teacher preparation programs has been argued in several works (Gkonou et al., 2020; Heineke & Vera, 2022; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021, 2022), with scholars agreeing that teachers' social-emotional skills is an influencing factor in the recruitment, preparation, and retention of teacher candidates (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022).

Formative assessment and SEL in pre-service EFL teacher education

Formative assessment, an ongoing process used to monitor student learning and provide feedback, is a critical component of effective teaching and learning (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015). It enables instructors to identify students' needs in real time and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. In foreign language education, formative assessment plays a vital role in fostering learner autonomy, engagement, and motivation (Dmitrenko et al., 2024; Ferreira et al., 2020). However, traditional assessment practices often contribute to heightened stress and anxiety, negatively affecting student performance (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

The integration of SEL into formative assessment seeks to mitigate these negative effects by prioritizing students' emotional well-being alongside their academic progress. SEL-based formative assessment emphasizes reflective practices, peer interactions, and constructive feedback, which help students develop emotional resilience and self-regulated learning strategies (Cefai et al., 2021; Dmitrenko & Budas, 2021). Recent studies have shown that such assessment practices improve students' ability to manage stress, stay motivated, and actively participate in learning (Dmitrenko et al., 2021; Heineke & Vera, 2022).

Theoretical framework

This study is based on the intersection of SEL and formative assessment in pre-service EFL teacher education. As mentioned earlier, SEL provides a framework for developing students' emotional intelligence and social

competencies and formative assessment is a process of continuous learning. The relationship between these two has been recognized in educational research but their interaction in crisis-affected educational settings has not been explored yet.

Several theoretical frameworks inform this study. The CASEL framework (2020) identifies five core SEL competencies that are the building blocks for students' emotional and social well-being. Research shows that these competencies are not only important for students' psychological resilience but also for academic engagement and motivation (Mahoney et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Formative assessment practices that integrate SEL principles develop self-regulated learning, growth mindset and emotional safety of the learning environment (Cefai et al., 2021; Heineke & Vera, 2022).

The theoretical grounding of formative assessment in this study is derived from Wiliam and Leahy's (2015) model, which conceptualizes formative assessment as an iterative process involving teacher feedback, peer collaboration, and self-assessment.

SEL skills are crucial for students to actively participate in the formative assessment process. Intriguingly, while formative assessments require SEL skills, they also contribute to the development of these skills. The routine involvement of students in formative assessments offers an organic context for refining their SEL capabilities, creating a beneficial cycle between SEL and formative assessment. Effective formative assessment implementation necessitates SEL skills, and in turn, guided formative assessments enhance SEL skills. Thus, incorporating SEL strategies into their regular curriculum and formative assessment procedures allows language instructors to cater to their learners' individual needs, ensure their mental well-being and, therefore, enhance their academic performance, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to language learning.

Combining CASEL's SEL framework with formative assessments, we argue that SEL skills are integrated into the formative assessment through: 1) Self-awareness as students' ability to adequately evaluate their strong and weak points, which aligns directly with the self-assessment dimension when students critically treat themselves and their work. 2) Self-management, which concerns goal setting, self-motivation, and organization, when students fully realize their learning aims and the ways they can be achieved, possessing a set of corresponding skills beyond simply doing what a teacher asks them to do. 3) Social awareness, which entails tolerance, respect, and empathy for others, and relates to student-peer feedback in the framework of formative assessment. 4) Relationship skills such as communication and teamwork form the core of the SEL skills and are vital for cultivating students' ability to create a fertile collaborative environment, which promotes language learning and holistic personal development. 5) Responsible decision-making is crucial for students' active role in shaping their learning path and promoting ongoing academic progress, which aligns with the concept of formative assessments as assessments for learning.

Therefore, SEL and formative assessment go hand in hand. The alignment between CASEL's five SEL skills (2013) and CCSSO's 10 Dimensions of Formative Assessment (2018) is clear. These dimensions of formative assessment address not just the teacher's business but also emphasize the student's role. Thus,

there is a strong and active role for students in formative assessment, and the role is largely dependent on well-developed SEL skills.

Method

Research design

According to Deveci and others (2013), the primary objective of a qualitative study is to achieve clearer delineations regarding a specific phenomenon. The current qualitative case study deals with the influence of formative assessment on pre-service EFL teachers' communicative skills. This study specifically examines how SEL techniques incorporated into formative assessment practices affect the development of communicative skills in the unique context of Ukrainian pre-service EFL teachers experiencing educational disruption during wartime conditions. The research question guiding this study is "How did the implementation of SEL techniques during formative assessment affect pre-service EFL teachers' communication skills?"

The study takes a qualitative case study approach, using semi-structured interviews, expert observations, and student artifacts to gather data. This mix of methods really boosts the validity of the findings by capturing various perspectives on the CASEL framework (2020) and Wiliam and Leahy's (2015) model of formative assessment, especially in crisis-affected educational settings. The qualitative case study design is particularly useful for understanding the complexity of the issue by delving into the lived experiences and perceptions of participants. This case is especially noteworthy as it focuses on pre-service EFL teachers in Ukraine, who are not only developing their professional skills but also facing displacement and trauma due to ongoing military conflict. These challenging circumstances have a direct impact on their emotional regulation and social interaction skills, which are crucial for both SEL and communicative skills development (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2022).

The expert observations were specifically crafted to see if students noticed improvements in their communication skills after engaging with SEL techniques in their classes. These observations laid the groundwork for the interview protocols, ensuring that data collection centered on how participants perceived their own communicative growth rather than just relying on external evaluations. This in-depth inquiry is vital for unpacking the complex nature of SEL implementation in formative assessment, taking into account factors like teacher preferences, student reactions, and the variety of educational contexts. It allows for a comprehensive understanding of how SEL and language instruction interact, leading to valuable insights into the challenges and successes within the studied environment.

Participants

Eighty pre-service English teachers, all in their third and fourth year of study, were invited to be part of this study. The sampling techniques outlined in the findings focused on students who met certain criteria, such as their year of study, English proficiency level, and enrollment in the participating institutions. Before recruitment began, we made sure to get approval from the Institutional Review Board at each university involved, and we adhered closely to all ethical guidelines for conducting research with potentially vulnerable populations.

During the study, SEL was introduced into their curriculum, and out of the 80 students, 12 agreed to join the study and to be interviewed. The recruitment procedure involved an initial information session explaining the purpose of the study, potential benefits (improved teaching strategies, enhanced self-awareness of communicative skills), and potential risks (time commitment, discussion of potentially emotional topics). All participants gave written informed permission and were advised that they might withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

These students, with an English proficiency ranging from B2 to C1 (according to CEFR), were drawn from institutions such as Kharkiv Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy, Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University, Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University, Berdiansk State Pedagogical University, and Uzhhorod National University. Hailing from diverse regions across Ukraine, including the south, east, west, and central parts, these participants underwent an extensive six-month teacher-preparation program (Table 1).

It is worth noting that many of these students had experienced displacement, either living abroad or in different cities within Ukraine, due to the ongoing crisis situation sparked by Russian aggression on Ukrainian territory. Given the unique circumstances these individuals have faced and continue to face, it is crucial to recognize that they have experienced and are experiencing trauma. As researchers, the authors of this manuscript, and university-level faculty in Ukraine, are aware of trauma, and followed the required protocols at our institutions to safely and ethically collect data throughout this study.

Table 1. Participant demographics

University	Number of Participants	Location Status			Gender	
		Home located	Internally displaced	Externally displaced	Female	Male
Kharkiv Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy	15	9	4	2	11	4
Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University	20	14	0	6	18	2
Berdiansk State Pedagogical University	16	2	6	8	13	3
Uzhhorod National University	14	12	0	2	10	4
Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University	15	12	0	3	12	3
Total	80	49	10	21	64	16

The participants' six-month teacher preparation courses were done remotely in an online manner, including both synchronous and asynchronous features. Prior to this study, the students included had no prior exposure to or experience

with social-emotional learning. This initiative sought to bridge this gap and provide instructors, as well as pre-service EFL teachers, with valuable insights and skills in integrating SEL practices into their future roles as English educators.

Data collection methods

Instructors from five different institutions that have integrated SEL into their teacher training programs shared various SEL activities with pre-service EFL teachers. After each lesson, the participants took part in 10-minute interviews to reflect on their experiences and share their thoughts about using SEL strategies in formative assessments, particularly focusing on how these strategies impacted their English communication skills.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out through an online platform, during which instructors from the participating universities asked a series of purposeful questions in order to collect valuable information from the pre-service EFL teachers. The interview format was inspired by Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) approach to semi-structured interviewing, which balances flexibility with a strong theoretical foundation. Eighty pre-service EFL teachers participated in the study voluntarily and were given the opportunity to provide insight into their experiences implementing SEL techniques within their chosen formative assessments, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative sampling in educational research.

The interview protocol contained twelve questions, or a mixture of questions addressed to groups of teachers and individual participants around three focused areas embedded in Weissberg and others' (2020) comprehensive SEL framework and Canale and Swain's (1980) aspect of the communicative skills model. The key areas of questioning were teacher understanding of SEL concepts (inspired by CASEL's five core skills), the teachers' implementation of SEL techniques in EFL teaching (derived from considerations of Merrell & Gueldner (2010) on classroom-based implementation), and the teachers' perceptions of the effects of SEL techniques on their students' communicative skills (informed by Dewaele (2019) on emotional intelligence in language learning).

Prior to the full rollout, the interview questions were subject to both an expert review and cognitive interview process as outlined in Castillo-Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement framework. This involved a review by three senior researchers with expertise in language education and SEL, followed by cognitive interviews with five pre-service teachers who did not participate in the primary study. The piloting phase, as suggested in van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), for qualitative research instruments, resulted in the refinement of four of the questions to ensure clarity and cultural relevance.

To facilitate collaboration and feedback, each instructor recorded data from the interviews of their students (pre-service teachers), as well as their reflections in an online shared document. This collaborative method of data collection aligns well with Yin's (2017) advice on following a chain of evidence in qualitative research. This shared document allowed all instructors who participated in the research to view and compare the data collected from interviews, contributing to a shared understanding of the effect of SEL techniques on pre-service EFL teachers' overall performance and their English communicative skills, as well as Saldaña's (2021) conceptualization of collaborative qualitative analysis.

In addition, instructors began to document the outcomes and products of SEL activities completed by pre-service EFL teachers (i.e. artifacts) using various online tools such as Google Docs, Jamboard, and Padlet. These outcomes and products became documented artifacts of the impact and effectiveness of using SEL techniques on their pre-service EFL teachers' overall performance and communicative skills in English. This practice provided opportunities to assess individual pre-service teachers' progress, while also contributing to an established shared understanding of the outcomes for integrating SEL into the formative assessment process. Utilizing different tools to document the process provided a more robust and dynamic process of collecting data.

Data analysis

The analysis phase consisted of an inductive approach as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The analysis took place in three stages. First, the raw data were reduced through multiple readings to recognize main themes. In the second stage, the condensed text was labeled and described in relation to the research questions. Finally, new findings were drawn through recursive analysis and the emergent findings were crosschecked with existing literature in publications for trustworthiness, measurability, and validity as suggested by Azungah and Kasmad (2018).

A team of five researchers engaged in the analysis first as individual researchers and then as co-analyzers which ensured analysis triangulation (Patton, 2015). If any disagreements occurred in coding (15% of coded segments), the research team re-examined the original data, shared their thoughts, and through discussion, came to a consensus on how to code the data. For the remaining 5% of codes the researchers could not agree upon, a senior researcher was consulted. To add trustworthiness and methodological rigour, verification strategies described by Morse and others (2002) were employed. A collaborative space (i.e. Google Drive), where the university teachers documented their observations and reflections on an online shared document, allowed for ongoing collaboration and observation. This further permitted instructors to observe and in unison check the strength of the interviews and artifacts when communicating the impact the SEL strategies may have had on students' English communication skills.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The information provided in this part of the article includes the most representative data from our research. To enhance the communicative skills in English of pre-service EFL teachers receiving online synchronous/asynchronous modes of training, the following SEL techniques were implemented in the formative assessments: *Exit ticket, Reading logs, Dialogue journals, Pilgrim's journal, Assessment rubrics, Reflective activities,* and *Graphic organizers.*

Exit ticket

Data revealed that the exit tickets were seen as one of the SEL strategies most liked by participants. Throughout the training program and study, exit tickets implemented at the start of each module were used as SEL activities by infusing CASEL's skills into them. Questions posed in the exit tickets regularly focused on the participants' emotions, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills. The questions

discussed as described in the method section included: *What three things did you learn in class (reflect on the knowledge and skills you've acquired), which two topics or activities did you find most interesting or engaging? Why? (consider what sparked your curiosity or joy, and think about how these topics or activities connected with you on a personal level), and which one concept or activity did you find challenging or did not fully understand? (reflect on what made it challenging and how you felt about encountering this difficulty). How would you do things differently today if you had a choice? How will you incorporate listening, speaking, reading, writing, and SEL principles into your lesson plans to support comprehensive language development and foster a nurturing, emotionally intelligent classroom environment? Reflect on today's teacher training session, and explain how you can promote collaborative learning in your own EFL classroom. Consider the importance of incorporating activities that promote interpersonal skills.*

In addition to asking students to respond to the exit ticket prompts by writing, we also gave the choice of having students provide visuals or use emojis to convey their message, instead of writing, if they preferred. Giving choice in assessment and instruction is a staple of effective trauma-sensitive and SEL in the language classroom (Darragh & Pentón Herrera, 2023). To deliver the exit tickets, we used digital tools like Jamboard, Google Forms, Mentimenter, Poll Everywhere or Answergarden. During the exit tickets, pre-service EFL teachers engaged with these different digital tools to offer insightful feedback after English classes. Using a mix of text, drawings, and emojis, participants expressed their understanding of the lesson content, shared their preferences for specific activities, and reflected on their language skills development. These digital tools offered a dynamic, visual portrayal of the participants' thoughts and were able to capture a range of feelings from positive emotions and understanding to challenging experiences from the session. Overall, digital tools, namely Jamboard, have shown to be an effective SEL tool for participants to share their experiences and provide recommendations for improvement. Respondent 1 expressed the validity of using digital tools as SEL strategies that foster communicative skills:

> *The Exit ticket helped me summarize what I have learned in class, allowing me to organize and remember the information better. I sensed a significant improvement in my communication skills throughout the semester. I felt more engaged and connected to the learning process, which positively influenced my ability to express myself in English. I attribute this improvement to the SEL techniques we've been using. The best of them, in my opinion, is Exit Ticket.*

Similarly, Respondent 2 reflected on the implementation of exit tickets by expressing:

> *The use of SEL techniques by my instructor has brought a refreshing change to the learning pace. Personally, I've always aimed to respond to such questions expressively, fueling my desire to enhance my speaking skills. The Exit ticket, coupled with SEL techniques, has proven to be an effective combination in promoting a positive learning environment.*

Data suggest that judging by all the reflections obtained the use of exit tickets as a SEL tool in English classes had a positive impact on pre-service EFL teachers' overall learning. The reflective nature of this activity allowed participants to consolidate their understanding of the material and assess their own learning. Participants like Respondent 1, have found that the exit ticket helps them organize and remember information better, leading to improvements in their communication skills. Other students like Respondent 2 highlighted how the implementation of exit tickets as SEL techniques, which promoted deeper reflection (i.e. self-awareness) and meaningful communication (i.e. relationship skills), positively influenced their learning experience and the online learning environment.

Reading logs

Reading logs allowed participants to engage in a variety of activities, such as responding to thought-provoking literature-related questions or copying a brief text on one side of the page while expressing their emotional responses on the other. When using reading logs, participants were instructed to adopt a 'stream of consciousness' style, documenting their evolving thoughts, images, associations, feelings, judgments, and other cognitive processes as they progress through the reading experience.

Participants agreed that reading logs were helpful tools, which helped them understand what to do because it clearly listed all the necessary steps required for the activity.

Participants' reflections about this activity were quite interesting. Respondent 3 shared:

> *The SEL-enriched formative assessment conducted in the form of a reading log activity offered valuable benefits for the development of my communicative skills. Consistent engagement with written materials through reading logs exposed me to a variety of language structures, idioms, and expressions, contributing to enhanced language comprehension and production. The cultural immersion provided by diverse readings promoted cultural awareness and sensitivity, essential for effective cross-cultural communication. Now I feel better prepared for discussions, being able to convey ideas coherently and succinctly. The self-reflection inherent in keeping a reading log extends to language use, prompting me to assess and improve my communicative strategies.*

Similarly, Respondent 4, shared her experience with SEL techniques implemented by her instructor, in particular reading logs:

> *I fell in love with SEL activities during challenging times. The optimistic and encouraging topics made me feel part of a supportive community, providing hope for the future. Expressing myself in unexpected ways became easier with the lecturer's smile, support, and sincere interest. Just like in a reading log, where we engage in thoughtful activities and document our evolving thoughts, Chamomile served as a valuable guide, fostering a structured and reflective approach to literary exploration.*

Both Respondent 3's and Respondent 4's statements best summarize the data collected about the effects of reading logs as SEL strategies. Data reflected that all the participants with no exception had positive reactions to the reading log activities, with Respondent 3 noting its impact on her communicative skills through SEL methods, and Respondent 4 appreciating the structured and reflective approach akin to a reading log in fostering a sense of community during challenging times.

Dialogue journals

Dialogue journals provided a space for instructors and participants to use our / their own lived experiences to develop both social-emotional and communicative competencies. It was a form of interactive, ongoing correspondence between instructors and participants, and among participants themselves.

When sharing her experience during the semi-structured interview, Respondent 5 mentioned:

> *The incorporation of SEL techniques created a dynamic and supportive learning environment. Engaging in activities such as dialogue journals that focused on emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills allowed me to not only enhance my language proficiency but also develop a deeper connection to the language. In group discussions, I found myself expressing ideas with greater clarity, and this newfound confidence translated into improved communicative skills. Furthermore, the inclusion of self-reflection activities in our assessments encouraged me to analyze my language use critically, fostering a continuous process of improvement. The supportive feedback from both peers and instructors during these reflections played a pivotal role in refining my language skills and promoting a collaborative learning atmosphere.*

Also reporting on the effect of dialogue journals, Respondent 6 noted:

> *I just fell in love with dialogue journaling the very first moment I had a chance to try it. Feeling exhausted and stressed in time of war I tried to find a way to distract myself from all the horrors around learning diligently and doing my best. However, the more I studied, the more distressed I felt (not everything went smoothly). The topics we discussed in our online journals, optimistic and encouraging ones, just made me feel part of the community and gave me hope for the future. Suddenly I felt necessary and important with my point of view, which just couldn't stop me from writing and expressing myself in quite unexpected ways. I was proud of myself and much more confident in my communicative abilities.*

Thus, all the data support our assumption concerning the vital importance of dialogue journals application in EFL classroom for both writing skills development and self-awareness of pre-service English teachers in times of war, which are indisputable aims and challenges educational community faces.

Pilgrim's journal

Throughout the six-month teacher training program, participants were expected to respond to different writing prompts. The number and style of prompts fluctuated throughout the training session. For example, some days there were three short prompts, and other days there was a choice to do one of two different prompts. At the end of each month, students were expected to submit a monthly report of their journaling. Each written response was expected to be six to eight sentences, and participants were asked to be thoughtful, reflective, critical, and detailed.

Data revealed that participants found it to be therapeutic. For example, Respondent 7 disclosed: *"Writing my Pilgrim's journal has had a very positive impact on me, because it calmed me down, helped me focus. In addition, it was a good opportunity to analyze my inner 'self', and distract from bad news."*

Similarly, Respondent 8 stated:

> *Engaging in creative writing within Pilgrim's journal cultivated a supportive and reflective environment where I was able to not only enhance my language proficiency but also strengthen my interpersonal and emotional competencies. I honed my skills to express thoughts, ideas, and reflections in English.*

Overall, evidence suggested that Pilgrim's journals were an effective SEL strategy for participants as it allowed them to share their personal experiences while engaging in reflective inner conversations. These experiences with journaling not only advanced participants' language use but also fostered a deeper understanding of the emotional nuances inherent in effective communication.

Assessment rubrics

In the realm of enhancing the communicative skills of pre-service EFL teachers, integration of SEL techniques into formative assessments, particularly through the implementation of assessment rubrics, seems to be quite a powerful but also complex approach. Participants consistently reflected on the crucial role of rubrics throughout this six-month teacher training. Take for instance Respondent 9's words: *"Rubrics make the process of assessment transformative. This offers a simple but adaptable model for speaking/writing tasks that enables a holistic and systematic review across a variety of tasks."*

This focus on clarity reflects a broader conversation about transparency as a core of SEL-enhanced formative assessment. Notably, versatile rubrics were found to be particularly relevant to participants. As Respondent 10 noted: *"Enhanced precision in assessment becomes evident when instructors invest effort in customizing rubrics to closely correspond with the nuanced demands of each task. This precision serves to enhance the reliability and relevance of the assessment process."*

The various approaches to rubric application seem to contribute to the depth of this SEL-infused formative assessment strategy. For example, holistic scales seem to provide an integrated evaluation of language performance, capturing an overall impression of participants' abilities. In contrast, analytic scales seem to

break down performance into distinct components, offering a comprehensive evaluation of content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar.

Reflective activities

Participants particularly enjoyed reflective activities. An example of reflective strategies used throughout the teacher training included: *Share the photo that makes you happy and peaceful, and explain why (either orally or in writing).* The objective of reflective activities was to develop participants' communicative skills as well as develop their skills of self- and peer assessment. While preparing to perform, participants were asked to take into account elements in the checklist, which would be analyzed and checked later by their peers and instructor. Having completed the checklist, each participant felt much more self-confident and responsible for their process of study.

Participants found reflective activities to be particularly relevant in improving their communicative abilities. For example, Respondent 1 mentioned: *"I felt that my communication skills have improved qualitatively.* […] *One of my favorite tasks was to have a chance to reflect on what I have written or said, as well as listen / read what my peers think of the same issue. This has a very qualitative effect on speaking skills, as well as on the ability to think creatively and outside the box, to leave the comfort zone."*

Similarly, Respondent 2 noted the effect reflective activities had on his expressive skills: *"My lecturer's SEL techniques implementation has been a nice change of pace. This way of engagement has cured my fear of asking for help, my anxiety to 'burden' someone with my problems."*

Data suggest that reflective activities (both self and peer reflection) prompted participants to analyze their communicative skills as well as feel positive about their learning, which seemed to increase their positive emotions and their well-being.

Graphic organizers

Graphic organizers have proven to be essential tools for promoting student autonomy and establishing a greater feeling of responsibility in language acquisition. For example, Respondent 11 expressed the impact of graphic organizers by stating, *"these tools [graphic organizers] empowered me to actively navigate my learning trajectory."*

When engaging with different graphic organizers like the KWL charts, participants gained profound insights. Respondent 12 explained that *"the utilization of the KWL chart before immersing myself in a literary discourse provided me with a systematic framework to express my comprehension."*

At the same time, this preparation method appeared to foster individual expression while also serving as a useful source of insights during later oral interactions between instructors and participants, as well as among participants, which benefited both educators and students. As Respondent 8 noted *"I gained more confidence in speaking and became more aware of the rules of normalized speech."*

Expert 1, one of the researchers engaged in interviewing students, highlighted how SEL strategies transformed her teaching experience: *"Besides boosting linguistic skills, SEL methods have proved to be effective for honing*

emotional intelligence. Group discussions, role-plays, and, more recently, mindfulness seem to be pretty good methods for creating a positive and welcoming space for students to engage more deeply with the language. The use of SEL in formative assessments, particularly peer reviews, when students give each other constructive feedback and support, is definitely beneficial for their collaborative learning and prepares them for practical communication."

Expert 2, another researcher and an English teacher, shared her perspective on the implementation of SEL techniques in the formative assessment process. She found the experience to be both challenging and profoundly impactful, stating: *"Looking back and comparing my pre-war experience and the one I have received for the last three years I came to the conclusion that I have gone through a range of emotions and faced unique circumstances. I started to feel a heightened sense of empathy for my students, recognizing the emotional toll that living in times of war can take on them and their families. Moreover, I came to understand that at hard times of war, the learning environment could be unpredictable and disrupted. Therefore, I had to be flexible in adapting my teaching methods and refine my skills in supporting students' social and emotional development."*

Besides the perspectives given by Expert 1 and Expert 2, Expert 3, another academician and EFL teacher, also expressed her views concerning the study: *"Prior to employing SEL methods, my EFL teaching was centered on content covering, language skill-building, and academic achievement. SEL has added something new to this. I now purposefully incorporate activities that foster collaboration, interaction, and empathy. My attitude towards difficulties in the classroom has also been transformed. I no longer see psychological or behavioral issues as obstructions to learning, but as occasions for learning and development. SEL techniques give me approaches to work with these situations productively, turning them into beneficial resources."*

Thus, SEL in formative assessment is a step beyond the traditional way of developing English communicative skills as it forms a learning space where emotional and language development converge.

Discussion

This qualitative case study aims to determine the impact of SEL techniques in formative assessments on the communicative skill development among pre-service EFL teachers. Results reveal that the incorporation of SEL techniques into formative assessment not only improved social-emotional skills but also communicative skills in the participants. In addition, the ongoing nature of SEL-influenced formative assessments contributed to creating a positive growth-oriented mindset, confirming Wylie and Lyon's (2020) study.

So, the above findings, given out after our discussions with the respondents, have led us to believe that the SEL techniques adopted in formative assessments do not only help language but also contribute towards the overall communicative abilities of our students. These observations reinforce the significance of holistic approaches to language learning in order to provide comprehensive educational experience (Dewaele et al., 2008; Shao et al., 2013).

Thus, in the interviews, Respondent 9, Respondent 10, and Respondent 12 stressed on the effectiveness of certain SEL strategies, namely assessment rubrics, as formative assessments for developing language competence and cooperation

with peers. The results prove that peer review inclusion in formative assessment significantly contributed to language development among pre-service EFL teachers as they learned the nuances of language, received constructive feedback on pronunciation and intonation which resulted in clear improvements in their spoken English. Such peer interaction in the collaborative atmosphere also gave rise to a camaraderie among the learners. The mutual exchange of language insights during peer reviews led to more profound understanding of effective communication strategies in English, which is also stated by Dewaele and others (2008) and Shao and others (2013). As the analysis of the semi-structured interviews discussed in the Findings section showed, the participants noted on multiple occasions that group SEL techniques in formative assessments helped them improve English communication, gain self-awareness, recognize and manage personal emotions, and treat others with respect simultaneously, which aligns with Noam & Triggs' (2023) findings.

Collectively, the data obtained from the interviews proved the positive impact of SEL techniques implementation in formative assessment for Ukrainian EFL pre-service teachers on their communicative skills.

Witnessing the positive impact on students has affirmed the belief that incorporating SEL is a valuable and enriching strategy in language education. As "language teachers need appropriate preparation in emotions and well-being to help them recognize the symptoms, identify the causes, and implement strategies that mitigate or significantly reduce students' suffering in their learning environment" (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2022, p.13), it is proved that incorporating SEL strategies into pre-service EFL teachers' regular curriculum and formative assessment procedures allows language instructors to cater for their learners' individual needs, develop their social skills, ensure their mental well-being, and therefore, enhance their academic performance, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to language learning (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Shahivand & Moradkhani, 2019).

Taking all the above-mentioned into consideration, it should be highlighted that the primary goal of the whole educational system today is to motivate, support, and create a peaceful learning environment where each participant feels appreciated and valued. The foremost aspect of the process of study – assessment and formative assessment in particular – is to be 'reformed' with the help of SEL techniques to really perform its function in modern-day reality and provoke students' desire to get deeper into the subject and their feeling of well-being despite any hardships on the way.

Each interviewee consistently emphasizes the transformative effect of SEL techniques (*Exit ticket, Reading logs, Dialogue journals, Pilgrim's journal, Assessment rubrics, Reflective activities,* and *Graphic organizers*) on their communicative skills, enabling them to surmount language barriers, gain confidence in English speaking, and engage in reflective practices for accuracy and register appropriateness. Students universally perceive the favorable impact of SEL tactics such as collaborative projects, mindfulness techniques, and peer evaluations, demonstrating their significance in building greater communicative skills, engagement, and language skills (Saliuk & Shkola, 2023). In exploring qualitative changes in attitude among pre-service EFL teachers after the implementation of SEL techniques, students consistently reported transformative

shifts. They noted a move from viewing English as a routine academic task to a personalized and meaningful journey, emphasizing emotional aspects that make the learning process enjoyable and relevant.

Conclusions

Thus, it is grounded that promoting SEL in formative assessment by university language instructors provides invaluable feedback for the teacher who can instantly react to the need and modify the material or strategy appropriately. It gives opportunities inside the classroom for pre-service EFL teachers to apply and expand those skills during their practicum and professional activities in the future to know how to create an emotionally comfortable environment in schools, which is beneficial to young learners and teenagers. University instructors who have been implementing SEL techniques emphasize its crucial role in promoting students' emotional intelligence, mental well-being that could not but had a positive impact on their students' academic performance. Teachers and students' perspective and worldview have also changed with the focus shifted to the friendly fertile classroom environment and flexibility in every possible aspect of language teaching and learning. Further research has some potential directions for further investigation: SEL as a support system for future teachers in crisis times, the relationship between SEL, stress, and professional identity, and institutional and policy aspects of SEL in formative assessment.

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