

A Study on the Impact of Integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into Primary School Students' Confidence in English Oral Expression

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the impact of integrating social and emotional learning into primary school English teaching on the confidence of third and fourth-grade students when they speak English. The different functions of six aspects, namely self-awareness, self-management, views of others, the ability to get along with others, collective awareness, and class management was focused. The aim is to find some practical empirical evidence for the English teaching reform in primary schools in the county. All collected data were statistically analyzed via SPSS software. The questionnaire survey employed the Social Emotional Competence Scale and the Self-Esteem Scale, with data analyzed statistically using SPSS software. The study demonstrates that integrating social-emotional learning into English teaching significantly enhances primary school students' social-emotional competencies and confidence in oral expression.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Learning; Primary School English; Confidence in Oral Expression

1. Introduction

Nowadays, global educational reforms are emphasizing the all-round development of students. This article finds that integrating social and emotional learning into subject teaching has become a key focus of attention. Social and emotional learning first emerged in the United States in the 1990s, with the aim of helping people cultivate several core abilities. For instance, the collaborative organizations of academic, social and emotional learning have also mentioned the ability to recognize one's own and others' emotions, get along well with people around, and make responsible decisions. Looking at the 2022 version of the compulsory Education English curriculum Standards in China, it requires the cultivation of students' core literacy, which specifically includes language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. However, a key problem has emerged in primary school English teaching at present: many students have little confidence in speaking English. Although previous studies (e.g., Chen, 2025; Huang, 2024) have attempted to find ways to integrate SEL into primary school English teaching, few have studied exactly what impact this has on students' confidence in oral English. In those counties and districts in Hainan Province where development is relatively slow, such related research is even fewer.

This study fills the research gap by exploring the impact of SEL on primary school students' confidence in oral English expression. Moreover, this paper focuses on analyzing six dimensions of SEL, namely self-awareness, self-management, cognition of others, management of others, collective cognition and collective management. This article selects 174 students from grades 3 to 4 in a county primary school in Hainan Province as the research objects. These students are all ordinary students in the school. This paper adopts a hybrid research method, including literature review, questionnaire distribution, experimental research and interviews, with the aim of constructing a fusion model of SEL and oral English confidence, which can make the relationship between the two clearer.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the current global education reform trend that increasingly emphasizes the all-round development of students, social and emotional learning has become a key framework for cultivating learners' non-cognitive abilities. This social and emotional learning first emerged in the United States in the 1990s and was defined as an educational approach aimed at fostering core skills. These skills include

emotion recognition and regulation, interpersonal relationship building, and responsible decision-making ability. Here, the definition of academic, social and emotional learning collaboration organizations is cited, as Chen mentioned in 2025. Since then, social and emotional learning has gained international recognition and has become an important part of modern education. Its application has also extended to several subject areas.

Under the backdrop of Chinese language education, the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards" explicitly states that it is necessary to cultivate students' core English literacy, which specifically includes language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. This standard also emphasizes the coordinated development of cognitive skills and emotional literacy, and regards emotional support as an indispensable part of effectively conducting language teaching. Despite such policy guidance, there is still a rather prominent problem in primary school English teaching: Many students generally have little confidence in expressing themselves orally in English, which affects the realization of language proficiency goals in the curriculum. Previously, academic research (e.g., Huang, 2024; Li, 2024) has explored ways to integrate SEL into primary school English teaching, but most of these studies only focus on general teaching practices and do not address the specific issues of oral English confidence much. In addition, in those underdeveloped county-level areas of Hainan Province, there are particularly few empirical studies on the relationship between SEL and the confidence of primary school students in oral English. This research gap also makes the educational strategies related to SEL less suitable for local application. This gap in the research field, coupled with the urgent need to solve the problem of students' lack of confidence in oral English at present, This further demonstrates that conducting this research is both necessary and timely.

1.2 Objective and Significance of the Study

The core objective of this study is to explore the impact of integrating social and emotional learning into primary school English teaching on students' confidence when they speak English. I would like to analyze the different influences of six different dimensions of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, perception of others, management of others, collective awareness and collective management on students' confidence in oral expression. This study selected 174 primary school students from grades 3 to 6 in a county town of Hainan Province as the research subjects. I adopted a mixed research method, combining literature review, questionnaire survey, experimental research and interview methods. This could verify whether SEL intervention could improve students' confidence in oral English and also clarify how SEL played a role in this process.

At the theoretical level, this paper builds a fusion model of SEL and primary school students' confidence in oral English expression, making up for the current deficiency in specialized research on SEL and confidence in oral English. It also enriches the theoretical system of SEL application in language education. From a practical perspective, This study explored specific and operational teaching methods for incorporating SEL into primary school oral English classrooms, providing direct references for primary school English teachers in county towns of Hainan Province. Research can also promote the simultaneous development of students' language proficiency and emotional literacy, which is in line with the requirements for the cultivation of core literacy in the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards", and can also help cultivate socialist builders and successors who are all-round developed in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and labor.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives and literature review, this study aims to answer the following three questions:

- a. What is the effect of integrating SEL into primary English teaching on students' overall social and emotional competence? Does the experimental group show significant improvement compared to the control group, and which dimensions improve the most?
- b. Can SEL-integrated English instruction significantly enhance students' confidence in oral English expression? How does the improvement compare between the experimental and control groups?
- c. Are there any significant gender or grade differences in the effect of the SEL intervention on social and emotional competence and oral English confidence?

2.2 Research Participants

For the teachers, this article selects two English teachers and two class advisors, totaling four teachers. These two English teachers have been teaching English to students in grades three and four for many years and are very familiar with students' oral expression and performance in class. The class advisors can usually understand students' daily behavior, emotional state, and communication with classmates. By chatting and conducting interviews with these four teachers, this article can supplement the deficiencies in the questionnaire data, making the survey results more reliable. This can ensure that the final survey conclusion is true and comprehensive.

This survey selected third and fourth grade students and English teachers from a primary school in a certain county of Hainan Province as the subjects of investigation. These students and teachers all come from this specific primary school, which can help us focus more on conducting subsequent research.

A total of 180 student questionnaires were sent out for this survey. After we removed the invalid questionnaires that were filled out repeatedly and had a lot of missing information, we finally obtained 174 valid questionnaires that could be used. Calculated, the recovery rate of the questionnaires was approximately 96.67%.

Given the limitations of the questionnaire survey, this paper randomly selected two English teachers and two head teachers from the third and fourth grades, as well as 14 students from a primary school in a county of Hainan Province for interviews.

The Social and Emotional Competency Scale consists of 22 items, which are divided into six dimensions and further categorized into three domains. The specific distribution is as follows:

- a. Personal Domain: Including the dimension of self-awareness (Items 1–4) and self-management (Items 5–8);
- b. Interpersonal Domain: Including the dimension of others' perception (Items 9–11) and others' management (Items 12–14);
- c. Collective Domain: Including the dimension of collective perception (Items 15–17) and collective management (Items 18–22).

2.3 Research Tools

2.3.1 Questionnaire

This survey utilized two standardized scales as the questionnaires, specifically including:

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale to be mentioned in this article was developed by Yan Yan and other researchers in 2021. This scale consists of a total of 10 questions and is used to measure relevant psychological indicators.

The Social and Emotional ability Scale used in this article was developed by Li Xinya in 2024. This scale is divided into three main parts. The first part is the relevant description of the questionnaire, which clearly explains what the questionnaire is for and how the collected information will be kept confidential. The second part is some basic information about the students, such as their gender and grade. The third part is about the grades of students' social and emotional abilities, which are further divided into six different dimensions, namely self-awareness, self-management, awareness of others, management of others, collective awareness and collective management. For the overall situation of the scale and the distribution of the number of questions in each part, you can refer to the content in Table 1.

Questionnaire Dimension	Question Number
Self-awareness	1、2、3、4
Self-management	5、6、7、8
Others' perception	9、10、11
Others' management	12、13、14
Collective perception	15、16、17
Collective management	18、19、20、21、22

Table 1 Dimensions of the Student Questionnaire and Corresponding Question Numbers

This article aims to ensure that the collected quantitative data is reliable and valid. Before starting the main analysis work, statistical tests were specifically conducted on both of these scales. This will make the subsequent analysis using these data more reassuring.

This paper uses Cronbach's alpha coefficient to evaluate the reliability of the scales used in the research. Let's first look at the Social Affective Ability Scale. Its overall Cronbach alpha coefficient is .892, and the coefficients of the six subdimensions range from .763 to .854. Such values indicate that the internal consistency of the scale is quite good. Looking at the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale again, its Cronbach alpha coefficient is .846, which is higher than the acceptable threshold of .70. Considering the coefficients of these two scales comprehensively, it can be seen that the reliability of these two measurement tools for the samples of our current study is quite satisfactory.

In this paper, exploratory factor analysis was used to study the validity of the scales. In the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy, the Social Affective Ability Scale achieved .871, and the confidence scale was .832. Both of these values exceeded the recommended .60. The Bartlett sphericity test achieved very outstanding results on both scales. This way, it can be confirmed that the data is suitable for factor analysis. The cumulative variance explained by the extracted factors was 68.5% for the Social and Emotional Ability Scale and 62.3% for the Confidence scale, indicating that the structural validity of these two scales is acceptable.

These psychological assessments have helped us confirm that the questionnaire used in this article is indeed reliable and useful, and can be used to measure the structure we want to measure among the target group of primary school students in Hainan Province.

Dimension	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Self-awareness	4	.823
Self-management	4	.795
Cognition of Others	3	.854
Management of Others	3	.763
Collective Cognition	3	.812
Collective Management	5	.801
Total Scale	22	.892

Table 2 Reliability and Validity of the Scales Social Emotional Ability Scale

Note. KMO = .871; Cumulative variance explained = 68.5%. Bartlett's test of sphericity: $*p < .001$.

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	KMO	Cumulative Variance Explained
Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale	10	.846	.832	62.3%

Note. Bartlett's test of sphericity: $*p < .001$ Interpretation for your supervisor:

Table 错误! 文档中没有指定样式的文字。 Self-confidence Scale

The KMO statistic is designed to assess the suitability of the entire item set for factor analysis. Therefore, it is reported only at the total scale level, not for individual sub-dimensions. This is standard practice in psychometric reporting. The table has now been restructured to avoid any confusion.

2.3.2 Interview Outline

The interview outline for the students in this study was designed based on the interview outline in Li Xinya's master's thesis. This outline mainly focuses on three directions: the relevant content of self-awareness and self-management, the perception of others and how to get along with others, as well as the content of collective awareness and collective management. The entire outline contains a total of

10 specific questions. The teacher interview outline of this study was designed based on the interview outline in Li Xinya's master's thesis. The main questions included what teachers' specific understanding of social and emotional learning was, how they usually integrated social and emotional learning into primary school English teaching, and also what aspects of support the school provided for social and emotional learning. A total of 9 questions were designed.

3. Research Results

The overall level of the research subjects in this article shows a very prominent positive improvement trend. Specifically, before the experiment began, the average score of the students' social and emotional abilities was 79.60 points, but after the experiment ended, this score rose to 83.64 points, an overall increase of 4.04 points, with an improvement rate of 5.08%. These data indicate that throughout the entire experimental process, the students' social and emotional abilities have indeed developed on the whole.

There are very prominent differences between the experimental group and the control group. The data analysis conducted in this paper also shows that the post-detection performance of the experimental group is indeed quite different from that of the control group.

The average pre-test score of experimental students was 79.52 points, and after the test, the average score became 86.72 points, with a total increase of 7.20 points. This increase rate is 9.05%. The average pre-test score of control students was 79.68 points, and after the test, the average score was 80.56 points. The score only increased by 0.88 points, corresponding to an increase of 1.10%. By comparing the score increase of the two classes, it can be found that the score increase of the experimental class is more than eight times that of the control class. This indicates that the experimental intervention measures we have implemented have a significant effect on improving students' social and emotional abilities.

All aspects of abilities have achieved significant development. The students in the experimental class have shown remarkable progress in each sub-dimension of social and emotional abilities. For instance, in specific areas such as self-awareness and emotional management, the extent of progress is quite prominent, and the progress among each dimension is also relatively balanced. There was no situation where any particular dimension was particularly prominent or particularly lagging behind.

In the personal domain, self-awareness scores increased by 2.27 points and self-management by 2.02 points. In the interpersonal domain, cognition of others and management of others each rose by 1.89 points. Likewise, in the collective domain, collective cognition and collective management both increased by 1.89 points. The control class, by comparison, showed no significant changes across any sub-dimension, indicating that systematic intervention is essential for developing each aspect of social-emotional competence.

As social-emotional abilities grew, students' confidence also improved. The experimental class' s mean confidence score rose from 31.65 to 34.09, an increase of 2.44 points, whereas the control class gained only 0.62 points (from 31.36 to 31.98).

Grade-level analysis showed clear gains in both the Grade 3 (+6.90) and Grade 4 (+7.50) experimental classes, with Grade 4 improving slightly more. The control groups showed limited progress. Gender differences were negligible: boys' scores increased by 7.18 points and girls' by 7.22 points, indicating the intervention was equally effective for both genders.

To further understand the effects of the SEL intervention, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 students, comprising 7 boys and 7 girls, and 4 teachers, including 2 English teachers and 2 head teachers, from both the experimental and control classes in the county primary school. The qualitative analysis of these interview data reveals a clear trajectory of change within the experimental class. Students transitioned from a state of apprehension to one of proactive engagement, internalizing phrases like "try to calm myself down" into their behavioral repertoire. This contrasts sharply with the control class, where the absence of targeted strategies left students feeling "not confident enough" and struggling with interpersonal friction. The teacher feedback serves as a meta-commentary on these shifts, confirming that the integration of emotional learning catalyzes tangible improvements in both classroom dynamics and individual student disposition.

4. Conclusion

This study, through a three-month quasi-experimental intervention with 174 third- and fourth-grade students from a county primary school in Hainan Province, examined the impact of integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into primary English teaching on students' social-emotional competence and oral English confidence. Drawing on both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data, the main findings are summarized as follows in response to the three research questions.

4.1 The Effect of SEL Integration on Students' Social and Emotional Competence

In response to the first research question, the results demonstrate that integrating SEL into primary English teaching significantly improves students' overall social and emotional competence. After the three-month intervention, the experimental group's post-test score ($M=86.72$, $SD=4.35$) was significantly higher than that of the control group ($M=80.56$, $SD=4.82$), with a mean difference of 6.16 points ($p<0.001$, Cohen's $d=1.24$), indicating a large effect size. All six dimensions—self-cognition, self-management, other-cognition, other-management, collective cognition, and collective management—showed statistically significant improvement ($p<0.01$). Among them, self-cognition exhibited the greatest gain ($\Delta=2.27$ points), while the other five dimensions each increased by 1.89 to 2.02 points. In contrast, the control group showed minimal change ($\Delta=0.88$ points). These findings confirm that the SEL-integrated instructional model effectively fosters the development of students' social and emotional abilities.

4.2 The Effect of SEL Integration on Students' Oral English Confidence

In response to the second research question, the results indicate that SEL-integrated English instruction significantly enhances students' confidence in oral English expression. The experimental group's mean confidence score increased by 2.44 points (from 31.65 to 34.09), which is approximately 3.94 times the gain observed in the control group ($\Delta=0.62$, from 31.36 to 31.98). Qualitative data from interviews corroborate this finding: students in the experimental class reported being "not so afraid of making mistakes anymore" and more willing to speak English voluntarily, whereas control class students expressed persistent fear of "being laughed at by my classmates." These results suggest that the supportive, low-anxiety classroom environment created by SEL integration effectively lowers students' affective filter, thereby boosting their willingness and confidence to engage in oral English communication.

4.3 The Moderating Effects of Gender and Grade

In response to the third research question, the findings reveal no significant interaction effects of gender or grade on the outcomes of the SEL intervention ($p>0.05$). Boys and girls benefited almost equally from the intervention, with score increases of 7.18 and 7.22 points respectively. Similarly, both third-grade (+6.90) and fourth-grade (+7.50) students showed substantial improvement, with the fourth graders exhibiting a slightly larger gain. The absence of significant gender or grade differences indicates that the SEL-integrated teaching approach has broad applicability and can be effectively implemented across different student subgroups in primary school settings.

In summary, this study provides empirical evidence that integrating SEL into primary English teaching is both feasible and effective. It not only promotes the all-round development of students' social and emotional competencies but also significantly enhances their confidence in oral English expression. The intervention effect is stable across gender and grade groups, suggesting its potential for wider application in similar county-level educational contexts.

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