VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI
UNIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

TRẦN THỊ YẾN

DOCTORAL THESIS

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES AT A PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

(Học tập cảm xúc xã hội: Một nghiên cứu khám phá về nhận thức và thực hành của sinh viên ngành sư phạm tiếng Anh tại một trường đại học sư phạm ở Việt Nam)

Major: English Language Teaching Methodology

Code: 9140111

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Supervisors:

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Hanoi, 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this doctoral thesis is entirely my original research work, completed as part of my PhD program at the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. I certify that this work has not been submitted, either in full or in part, for any other degree or qualification at this or any other training institution. I also declare that I have fully cited and referenced all the materials and results that are not original to this work.

Signature of the PhD Student:

Date: December 14, 2025

Trần Thị Yến

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CASEL	The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ETTC	EFL teacher training curriculum of VPU
FI	Focus Group Interview Question Item
FIPT	Focus Group Interviewed Pre-service Teacher
FLEF	Foreign Languages Education Faculty
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnam)
OPT	Observed Pre-service Teacher
OTT	Observed Teacher Trainer
QI	Questionnaire Item
SEA	Self-awareness
SECs	Social Emotional Competencies
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SELIC	SEL Instructional Competence
SEM	Self-management
SOA	Social awareness
RES	Relationship skills
RDM	Responsible decision-making
SI	Semi-structured Interview Question Item
ITT	Interviewed Teacher Trainer
VGEC	2018 Vietnamese General Education Curriculum
VPU	Pseudonym of a Pedagogical University in Vietnam

Abstract

In response to growing global attention toward Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a promising approach to holistic education, this study explores the perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers in a pedagogical university in Vietnam. The study adopted exploratory sequential mixed-methods design and utilized document analysis, interviews with teacher trainers, focus group interview with pre-service teachers, classroom observations and finally a survey questionnaire. The findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers generally hold positive perceptions of SEL. They acknowledged the strong relevance of SEL in the EFL classroom and the multiple roles of EFL teachers in fostering social-emotional competencies (SECs) for students; however, their knowledge of SEL remains limited, fragmented and intuitive. They also expressed concerns about the lack of explicit training on SEL, which left them underprepared for SEL; therefore, they expressed a strong desire for more structured and explicit training in SEL. Regarding practices in SEL, the findings indicate moderate to high levels of SECs. Among the five core SECs, social awareness was rated highest while self-management was scored lowest. SEL instructional competence was rated lower than all the five core SECs. Among its five components, strengths were observed in applying pedagogical and psychological principles, organizing activities to foster SECs and modeling SECs for students; however, challenges were found in explicit SEL instruction and assessment. In general, these practices were often implicit, reactive and intuitive rather than proactive or intentional. These perceptions and practices may be shaped by the characteristics of the teacher education program, where SEL-related training was found to be unstructured, inconsistent, unbalanced, and largely implicit. Finally, significant positive correlations among SEL perceptions, practices and training were found, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive and explicit training in SEL to foster positive perceptions and effective practices. These findings not only contribute to theoretical understanding of how global SEL frameworks can be localised, perceived and practiced in a non-western context but also offer practical recommendations for promoting SEL in teacher education programs.

Key words: Social and Emotional Learning; Social–Emotional Competence; Teacher Education; English Language Education; Perceptions; Classroom Practices; Mixed-Methods Research; Vietnamese Education.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This introduction lays the foundation for exploring the integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into EFL teacher education. Firstly, it discusses the global call for holistic education, the emergence of SEL, its relevance in the English classroom and its current status in Vietnamese education. Based on this background, the chapter emphasizes the necessity of equipping pre-service EFL teachers with social emotional competencies (SECs) and SEL instructional competence. Finally, it points out research gaps regarding their perceptions and practices related to SEL, which provides the rationale for an intensive investigation into these aspects.

1.1. Background to the Study

This section provides the rationale for the research on pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL. Firstly, it discusses the increasing emphasis on holistic education worldwide and argues that academic learning alone is insufficient for student comprehensive growth. In this context, SEL has emerged as a transformative approach to holistic education. However, effective SEL integration requires that teachers be trained in SEL; therefore, the significance of integrating SEL into teacher education is discussed. Finally, the specific context of Vietnam is taken into consideration to explore potential alignments and conflicts when introducing SEL into its educational system.

1.1.1. The global call for a holistic education

Traditionally, education has viewed mathematical and linguistic intelligences as the most important aspects (Bridgeland et al., 2013). However, over the past few decades, due to rapid social, economic and technological changes, scholars have increasingly recognized the necessity of a more holistic approach to education that includes the development of not only academic skills but also physical, social and emotional skills such as emotion regulation, collaboration, effective communication and conflict resolution (CASEL, 2020). These skills are necessary for any individuals to become autonomous, active learners and then successful global citizens. Research suggests that non-cognitive skills may better predict life success than cognitive skills alone (Kautz et al., 2014).

Jones and Kahn (2017) further confirms the need for a more holistic approach to education. They explained the interconnected nature of social, emotional and cognitive domains and assert that these aspects must be cultivated together, systematically and developmentally throughout a child's education to promote students' emotional intelligence, social competence, academic achievements and overall growth. A growing body of empirical research also demonstrates this interconnectedness. For example, Zins et al. (2004) found that integrating social emotional skills into education can enhance students' academic success as they can help students communicate effectively and regulate their learning processes.

Moreover, young people today face more challenges such as increasing mobility, individualism, materialism and mental health issues (OECD, 2024). According to the World Health Organization (2017), twenty percent of school children experience mental health problems annually, especially depression and suicide issues. Other issues include declining motivation to learn, increasing dropout rates and rising incidences of school bullying and violence (Swearer et al., 2010). To address these issues, a more comprehensive educational approach is required to foster not only students' cognitive skills but also their social-emotional skills to prepare them for the challenges of the modern world (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Therefore, today's education demands more from schools and teachers than ever before. The mission of schools now includes not only the transmission of content knowledge and the development of cognitive skills but also the nurturing of responsible, socially skilled and emotionally resilient citizens (Johnson & Wiener, 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). SEL has the potential to meet these new requirements as it provides an evidence-based framework for fostering the social-emotional dimensions of student development and at the same time improving their academic performances, realizing the global goals of holistic education (Cefai et al., 2018, Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

1.1.2. The emergence of Social Emotional Learning in education

In response to the global call for a holistic education, SEL has been developed as a transformative educational approach (Durlak et al., 2011). It offers both a conceptual and practical framework for integrating social and emotional goals into educational goals. In fact, the emergence of SEL reflects a global rethinking of educational priorities, balancing social-emotional growth with academic achievement. It has also become an umbrella term for various concepts such as non-cognitive development, character education and 21st-century skills training (OECD, 2024).

SEL is defined as the process of teaching students to manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions (Weissberg et al., 2015). SEL focuses on the development of specific social and emotional skills under the five core domains, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Under the leadership of CASEL (the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, founded in 1994), SEL has become a global movement which supports students' holistic development (Domitrovich et al., 2019). Despite its origin in the U.S., SEL has gained global attention. Many schools worldwide have invested in implementing SEL standards, curricula, programs and strategies (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013), and the volume of publications on SEL has also increased rapidly, reflecting growing global interest in SEL.

Although the family plays an important role in developing SECs in children, school-based interactions with teachers and peers are also very important (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Therefore, schools are increasingly recognized as ideal environments for fostering these social and emotional skills in addition to academic skills (Elias and Weissberg, 2000). When students are equipped with strong social and emotional skills, they are better prepared to handle stress, form positive relationships and make responsible decisions, which can reduce risks such as academic failure, mental health issues and behavioral problems (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Therefore, today, SECs are regarded as both means and end-products of education, alongside academic achievements (Jones & Kahn, 2017); however, SEL is still a missing piece or just an add-on component in the education system of many countries (Bridgeland et al., 2013).

1.1.3. Relevance of Social Emotional Learning in the English classroom

A growing body of research has confirmed the effectiveness of integrating SEL into daily classroom activities and many studies reveal that SEL is most impactful when taught by classroom teachers within the curriculum (Durlak et al., 2011; Skald et al., 2012). Subsequent studies also find that combining SEL with academic instruction such as literacy, arts and language can enhance students' ability to manage their emotions and build social skills, which can facilitate the learning process (Cefai et al., 2018; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013; Waajid et al., 2013).

In the context of the EFL classroom, the social and emotional aspects of learning need to be taken into consideration (Dewaele et al., 2022; Mercer, 2021; Pentón Herrera, 2020). Research has demonstrated the significant roles of social contexts and emotional aspects in language learning. For example, Vygotsky's (1989) Sociocultural Theory analyzes the inherently social nature of language learning. This theory suggests that language acquisition is fundamentally influenced by or constructed in socially rich environments where communication, collaboration and mutual understanding are emphasized. Gholami (2012) and Montero et al. (2014) reinforces the idea that social contexts play a significant role in language learning.

The emotional aspects of language learning such as motivation and satisfaction, are also important for learner engagement and progress (Yu, 2022). Positive emotions such as enjoyment and interest can increase motivation to learn and facilitate cognitive processes (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Conversely, negative emotions such as anxiety, shame and frustration can hinder language acquisition as they may create psychological barriers to language learning. Shao et al. (2013) further emphasize the importance of emotions in language learning. They call for a more comprehensive approach that incorporates social and emotional considerations into language teaching practices to create a more supportive and effective learning environment.

The above studies indicate the potential of incorporating SEL into language education to create a more holistic approach to language teaching that addresses all the cognitive, social and affective needs of learners (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Emotional strategies will help learners manage anxiety, boost motivation, foster positive thinking and enhance self-esteem (Arnold & Brown, 1999); meanwhile, social strategies will enable learners to interact with other speakers, develop cultural understanding and empathize with others in the process of improving language proficiency (Gholami, 2012; Montero et al., 2014). However, to fully exploit the potential of the EFL classroom as a fertile ground for SEL integration, there must be structured training in SEL for teachers.

1.1.4. The need to incorporate Social Emotional Learning into teacher education

Teachers are increasingly expected to foster not only academic skills but also SECs of their students; therefore, they need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills throughout their training program to support student holistic development (Lawlor, 2016; Markowitz et al., 2016). However, traditionally, teacher education programs have concentrated primarily on subject knowledge and general pedagogy, but often overlooked the importance of teachers' SECs as well as their role in fostering these skills in students (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Today, there is a growing consensus that this approach needs to be complemented by a more explicit focus on teachers' own SECs as well as their competence to teach SEL (Jennings et al., 2017). All of these personal and instructional competencies will enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

SEL training offers huge benefits for teachers themselves in terms of their own SECs. Strengthening these skills helps teachers effectively manage stress, prevent emotional exhaustion, mitigate burnout and enhance professional fulfillment (Jennings et al., 2017). Additionally, improved SECs can boost teachers' self-efficacy, empowering them to foster stronger relationships with students, colleagues and the broader school community. These combined benefits lead to greater job satisfaction, improved overall well-being for teachers, higher-quality teaching practices and enriched learning experiences for students (Braun et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2013).

Despite these clear advantages, the current state of SEL integration in teacher education programs remains fragmented and inadequate (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Previous research findings reveal that many teacher training programs address SEL superficially as supplementary modules rather than embedding SEL deeply within the core curricula (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Markowitz et al., 2016). Such fragmented training can lead to gaps in teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL (Taylor et al., 2017). Therefore, to ensure sustainable implementation, there is a pressing need to systematically incorporate SEL into teacher education programs (Jones & Kahn, 2017). This structured and intentional training can ensure that teachers are fully equipped to foster the emotional, social and academic success of themselves and their students.

1.1.5. Social Emotional Learning in Vietnamese education

Despite the growing momentum worldwide, SEL remains a relatively new concept in Vietnam, with limited research and structured implementation (Huynh et al., 2021). However, Vietnam's educational policies have increasingly emphasized the importance of holistic education, integrating social, emotional and ethical development alongside cognitive learning (National Assembly, 2014). Although SEL as a distinct concept is not explicitly outlined in Vietnamese policy documents, its underlying principles are subtly embedded within other terms, such as life skills education, character education, moral education, civic education, citizenship education, extracurricular activities or experiential activities (Huynh et al., 2021; MOET, 2018). This implicit inclusion suggests an alignment between Vietnam's educational goals and global SEL principles; however, without structured, explicit and consistent guidelines, SEL remains fragmented and inconsistent across schools in Vietnam (Tran & Le, 2023).

Since 2013. Vietnam has been carrying out one of its most ambitious education reforms, known as the Fundamental and Comprehensive Education Reform. Unlike earlier reforms, this reform is more comprehensive across different areas of education, ranging from textbooks and curriculum to teacher qualifications, assessment, professional development and school leadership (Ho & Dimmock, 2023). The beginning of this reform is closely tied to the promulgation of Resolution 29-NQ/TW by the Vietnamese Communist Party in 2013, and then Resolution No. 88/2014/QH13 by the National Assembly. These documents serve as national directives for reforming the general education curriculum. They clearly state the aim of reforming education is to:

> *"fundamentally and comprehensively transform the quality and effectiveness of general education; to integrate the teaching of knowledge, morality and career orientation; and to shift from a content-heavy model to an educational model that focuses on the comprehensive development of both competencies and qualities, harmonizing morality, intellect, physical well-being and aesthetics, while maximizing each student's potential" (National Assembly, 2014).*

Specifically, they emphasize the development and also assessment of physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic and moral aspects of the learner, many of which closely align with the core competencies of SEL, such as self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and self-management (CASEL, 2020; Tran & Le, 2023). This reform reflects a growing recognition that education must support students not only academically but also emotionally and socially to prepare them for real-life challenges and lifelong learning.

Following these important resolutions, the 2018 General Education Curriculum 2018, issued via Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT by MOET, marks a transition from a knowledge-based to competency-based curriculum, aiming at developing *"phẩm chất"* (qualities) and *"năng lực"* (competencies) in students across all grades. The curriculum establishes five key personal qualities for students, namely *"patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty and accountability"*. The curriculum also emphasizes competency-based education, integrating general competencies like *"autonomy and self-learning, communication and collaboration, and problem-solving and creativity"* (MOET, 2018). The emphasis on these qualities and competencies align with global trends that advocate for the integration of SEL into education.

Regarding teachers' roles, the Professional Standards for Teachers of General Education Institutions, issued via Circular 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT by MOET in 2018, serves as a framework outlining the competencies and responsibilities of K-12 teachers in Vietnam. The document emphasizes teachers' roles in supporting the comprehensive development of students, including their moral, social and emotional growth. However, they provide little clear, concrete and actionable guidance on implementation, particularly on how teachers can integrate these SEL elements into classroom instruction (Tran & Le, 2023). Without a structured competency framework, explicit implementation guidelines and assessment criteria, the integration of SEL remains inconsistent and largely dependent on individual teachers' interpretations (Huynh et al., 2021; Phan, 2021).

Another challenge is the lack of explicit or mandatory SEL training and professional development for teachers to ensure teachers develop the necessary competencies to implement SEL effectively (Tran & Le, 2023). SEL-related principles and skills are sometimes introduced in pedagogy courses or optional workshops, but they are neither mandatory nor standardized across teacher training programs. Teacher education curricula primarily focus on subject-matter knowledge, general pedagogy and practicum experiences, with limited emphasis on social and emotional skill development. Consequently, many teachers enter the profession without formal preparation for addressing the social and emotional dimensions of the classroom and must rely on personal experiences or informal learning instead (Do & Zsolnai, 2022). This lack of systematic preparation creates gaps in how teachers understand and apply SEL.

Another significant limitation is the absence of a structured SEL framework for teachers specifically adapted to the Vietnamese educational and cultural context. This framework should clearly define SECs and SEL Instructional Competence that teachers need to possess (Huynh et al., 2022). Without explicit indicators, it becomes challenging to guide teacher training, ensure consistency, and establish clear criteria for assessment. Consequently, it remains difficult to measure if teachers effectively foster SECs among

their students or possess the necessary competencies to implement SEL successfully (Hoang & Vu, 2016). This situation leads to inconsistent implementation, where SEL practice becomes overly reliant on individual teachers' personal motivation, beliefs and experiences, rather than being guided by a cohesive, standardized national framework.

Moreover, integrating SEL into Vietnamese education may face cultural challenges (Hoang & Vu, 2016). The deep-rooted Confucian values that continue to influence Vietnamese educational practices may pose significant conflicts with SEL principles (Vu, 2022). Confucianism favors rote memorization, social harmony, respect for authority and moral development over open emotional expression and conflict resolution, which often leads to a passive learning environment where critical thinking and emotional skills are undervalued (Kataoka et al. 2020; Saito et al. 2008; Tanaka, 2020; Taylor, 2002). These traditional perspectives may create resistance or reluctance to SEL implementation, which prioritizes emotional intelligence and student autonomy.

In addition, the Vietnamese education system has traditionally prioritized academic achievement and high-stakes exam preparation, which might have led to the neglection of social and emotional skills (Tran & Le, 2023). The existing curricula are already densely packed with academic knowledge and requirements. As a result, SEL may be seen as an extracurricular activity, an added burden rather than a complementary part of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, in Vietnam, SEL integration is more advanced in private educational institutions than in state schools (Huynh et al., 2021). Private educational centers, especially at the level of early childhood and primary education, have increasingly adopted SEL programs from countries like the USA and Canada. In contrast, SEL implementation in state schools is limited and often considered an optional or extracurricular activity (Tran & Le, 2023).

In summary, Vietnam's educational policies do mention and promote SEL-related skills, providing foundational legitimacy and momentum for incorporating SEL. Although they do not mention SEL explicitly by name, their SEL-related objectives positions SEL as a promising framework to fulfilling Vietnam's educational goal for student holistic development. However, the challenge ahead lies in translating these ambitions into specific guidelines, practical strategies and coherent support systems to ensure SEL becomes an integral, visible and sustainable part of Vietnam's education system.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

The evolving demands of 21st-century education have increasingly exposed the limitations of traditional education, which has historically prioritized cognitive knowledge and test-based performance while neglecting social and emotional skills essential for lifelong success (Kautz et al., 2014). As societies and labor markets shift

toward an era requiring interpersonal skills, adaptability, resilience and emotional intelligence, education systems worldwide have begun integrating SEL as a formal framework to foster these essential skills. SEL fosters emotional regulation, empathy, collaboration and responsible decision-making, enabling students to engage in social interactions, build relationships and manage challenges effectively (CASEL, 2020). While many Western countries have systematically embedded SEL into their educational standards, teacher education and classroom practices, Vietnam's implementation of SEL remains implicit, fragmented and inconsistent (Huynh et al., 2021; Tran & Le, 2023).

Although Vietnam's educational policies strongly advocate a holistic approach to education, promoting qualities such as patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty and responsibility, alongside general competencies like self-regulation, communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills (MOET, 2018), these policies fail to provide clear implementation guidelines, explicit frameworks or structured assessment mechanisms for teachers (Tran & Le, 2023). The Professional Standards for Teachers of General Education Institutions emphasizes teachers' roles in fostering students' moral, social and emotional growth, but they do not mandate specific training or professional development in these aspects (MOET, 2018). This gap leaves SEL open to interpretation, inconsistently applied across schools, and often regarded as extracurricular rather than core instructional activities (Do & Zsolnai, 2022). This situation reveals a concerning gap between the country's philosophical advocacy of holistic education and its practical implementation in classrooms.

Although teachers are expected to support students' holistic development, there remains limited formal training and professional development specifically aimed at preparing them to effectively foster students' SECs (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Although certain pedagogical courses and occasional professional development workshops may introduce elements related to SEL, there are no standardized requirements or systematically structured SEL training embedded within teacher education curricula. The predominant focus continues to emphasize content mastery, academic instruction and exam-based performance, leading to the marginalization of social and emotional skills such as emotional regulation, goal setting and conflict resolution (Tran & Le, 2023). Consequently, many teachers enter the profession without adequate preparation to effectively manage the complex social and emotional aspects inherent in teaching and learning (Huck et al., 2023; Markowitz et al., 2016). This paradox indicates the urgent need to review and reframe teacher preparation to address not only the cognitive but also the emotional and social dimensions of teaching and learning (Fleming & Bay, 2004).

This issue becomes even more pronounced for EFL teachers, who face unique social-emotional challenges directly related to language acquisition, intercultural communication and classroom engagement (MacIntyre et al., 2019). EFL learners frequently experience language anxiety, shame, self-doubt and communication barriers that negatively impact their linguistic growth, motivation and overall emotional well-being (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dewaele et al., 2022). Since language learning is inherently social and emotional, it provides great opportunities for developing SECs, for example through student check-ins, storytelling, pairwork, group work, discussions, project-based learning and communication tasks. In the meanwhile, SEL supports language acquisition by creating emotionally safe, engaging and collaborative learning environments (MacIntyre et al., 2019). However, without systematic SEL training, teachers lack both the pedagogical vision and practical skills to utilize these opportunities.

Despite extensive international research clearly demonstrating a strong relationship between SEL and second language acquisition (Dewaele et al., 2022; Melani et al., 2020; Mercer, 2021; Pentón Herrera, 2020), there are still noticeable gaps in the integration and implementation of SEL in teacher education programs in Vietnam. This overlook is particularly problematic given the deeply interpersonal and emotionally demanding nature of language learning, which requires students and teachers to tackle emotional vulnerability, linguistic anxiety or cultural misunderstandings. Without adequate training, EFL teachers may lack a conceptual understanding of SEL and have little experience in implementing it in practices.

In this context, it is necessary to carry out empirical research that explores pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions, classroom practices and training experiences related to SEL. Currently, there is little empirical research in Vietnam on how future EFL educators understand SEL, perceive its relevance, translate their knowledge into actual practices, or whether and how SEL is being formally incorporated into their training program. An understanding of these aspects will reveal challenges and opportunities for promoting SEL in teacher education, which will then inform policy reforms, curriculum enhancements and professional development programs to ensure that future EFL teachers are equipped to address the social-emotional dimensions of language instruction.

1.3. The Researcher's Growing Interest in Social Emotional Learning

My interest in SEL developed when my supervisors introduced me to the concept while discussing potential research topics. At that time, I had never heard this term before, so we discussed what SEL is and what benefits it can bring about. This discussion made me begin reflecting on my language learning and teaching experiences. As I looked back on my previous experiences, I began to realize how SEL had been an integral part

throughout my 30 years as a language learner and 15 years as an EFL teacher as well as an EFL teacher trainer, even though I had not formally recognized it.

I recalled the challenges I faced in learning foreign languages such as English, Russian and Chinese; however, with good social and emotional competencies (SECs), especially in self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making skills, I could learn the languages well. As an EFL teacher, I observed similar patterns among my students. Those with better SECs were more determined, motivated and successful in their language learning. I had always intuitively provided this social and emotional support to my students by building a classroom environment that prioritized respect, discipline, motivation, empathy and open communication. However, it was not until my supervisors' suggestion that I connected these practices to a formal framework of SEL.

I realized that my colleagues and I had been incorporating a lot of SEL-related practices into our teaching without explicitly recognizing them as SEL. For instance, we frequently encouraged students to work collaboratively on projects, which naturally fostered social awareness and relationship skills. We also regularly organized activities that encouraged self-awareness and self-management via reflective journaling. These activities were very frequent in our teaching, yet we didn't explicitly connect them to SEL. In my role as a teacher trainer, I also often encourage my pre-service teachers to build strong relationships with their students, manage the classroom and foster a positive classroom climate, which are core principles of SEL. I practiced SEL principles naturally, intuitively and unintentionally, but I did not recognize them as part of a SEL framework.

It can be seen that many teachers already incorporate SEL into their teaching practices, even though they do not use the specific terminology. The SEL principles that they employ in their teaching practices are just a natural response to the needs of their students. However, these intuitive practices lack the structure and intentionality that a formal and explicit SEL framework can offer. Without clear frameworks, training or institutional support, the implementation of SEL was inconsistent, reactive and largely dependent on individual teacher's awareness and personal teaching style or philosophy rather than proactive, intentional and structured. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize SEL as a formal framework so that we can systematically and intentionally foster social and emotional skills for students and at the same time promote their academic performance.

That is the way my interest in exploring SEL grew. I began studying its concepts, principles, frameworks and best practices related to SEL in education. Throughout this research journey from intuitive perceptions and practices to formal research, I became a passionate advocate for SEL as I recognize its important roles in educating well-rounded, emotionally intelligent and socially competent learners. Today, I continue to promote SEL in my work as an EFL teacher and teacher trainer. I am dedicated to equipping

teachers, both in-service and pre-service, with the knowledge and skills to integrate SEL effectively into their teaching practices to ensure that teachers are not only teaching language but also fostering the holistic development of their students.

Therefore, I conducted this study to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions, practices and training in SEL. I choose SEL as I recognize its important role in nurturing well-rounded students. I choose the English language subject as it aligns with my background as an English language learner, teacher and trainer. I begin with pre-service teachers rather than in-service teachers because I believe that early SEL training in a teacher's career can establish a strong foundation for their future practice. The findings of my study can contribute significantly to the field of education by advocating for a more holistic approach to teacher training, general education and EFL instruction. I believe this approach will produce academically, emotionally and socially competent teachers and students who can succeed in every aspect of life.

1.4. Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how pre-service EFL teachers perceive and practise Social Emotional Learning within their professional learning at a teacher training institution in Vietnam. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate their perceptions of SEL, their practices in SEL within their professional learning and how these perceptions and practices are shaped by the teacher education program.

To achieve this aim, the study pursues three specific objectives:

i. To explore how pre-service EFL teachers perceive Social Emotional Learning in the Vietnamese teacher-education context.

ii. To explore how they practise Social Emotional Learning in their professional learning.

iii. To explore how the EFL teacher education program shapes their perceptions and practices.

Aligned with these objectives, three research questions are formulated:

RQ1. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive Social Emotional Learning?

RQ2. How do they practise Social Emotional Learning within their professional learning?

RQ3. How does the EFL teacher education program shape their perceptions and practices?

The three research questions are closely interrelated, with each question addressing a specific aspect of SEL within the context of EFL teacher education, but altogether they

form a progression from training to individual perceptions and actual practices among the pre-service teachers. RQ1 seeks to explore their perceptions of SEL, investigating their knowledge of SEL, their perceptions of its benefits, their perceived roles in SEL, the challenges they face and their perceived preparedness for integrating SEL into classroom practices. RQ2 focuses on exploring their actual practices in SEL, investigating how they demonstrate the five core SECs as well as the five components of SEL instructional competence within their professional learning. RQ3 turns to the role of the EFL teacher education program in shaping these perceptions (RQ1) and practices (RQ2). It examines the specific SECs and SEL instructional competence components addressed in the curriculum, teacher trainers' perspectives on SEL training, and the strategies they employed to foster SEL competencies for pre-service teachers. Examining the program context provides a contextual backdrop that helps discuss why pre-service EFL teachers perceive and practise SEL in particular ways. Eventually, findings from this comprehensive exploration can inform research, policy and practice related to SEL in teacher education.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on exploring the perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers at a pedagogical university in Vietnam (VPU). Regarding the content scope, the study focuses on three interrelated aspects of SEL within the EFL teacher education program of VPU. First, it explores pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of SEL, including their familiarity with SEL concepts, perceived benefits for teaching and learning, challenges in implementation and their preparedness to incorporate SEL into teaching practices. Next, it assesses how pre-service EFL teachers practise SEL in terms of SECs and SEL instructional competence withing their professional learning. Finally, the scope extends to explore how the EFL teacher education program shapes the context within which these perceptions and practices develop.

Regarding the setting and participants, the study is limited to the pre-service teachers enrolled in the EFL teacher education program of one Vietnamese pedagogical university (VPU) at the time of the study. Their perceptions and practices of SEL are the central focus of the research. The study also involves EFL teacher trainers of VPU as their perspectives and practices related to SEL are important for a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Regarding the time scope, the research focuses on the contemporary situation of SEL training, perceptions and practices during the academic year 2023-2024. It means that the study concentrates on the current situation rather than analyzing changes over time.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study carries both theoretical and practical significance for SEL scholarship and teacher education reform in Vietnam and similar cultural contexts. Theoretically, the study contributes to the expanding body of SEL research by offering culturally contextualized findings into how SEL is perceived, practised and experienced within the specific sociocultural context of a Vietnamese teacher education university. As most of the existing research has been influenced by Western educational philosophies, there is still a noticeable gap in how SEL can be applied or adapted in non-Western, CHC contexts like Vietnam.

In addition, the study has developed and validated a comprehensive SEL framework, which has been localized for pre-service EFL teachers, compared against the CASEL framework, informed by empirical evidence, adapted to the Vietnamese EFL context, sensitive to cultural values, and aligned with national educational goals. The framework details not only the five core personal SECs but also introduces a sixth construct essential for teacher preparation, SEL instructional competence, which captures teachers' ability to design, model and assess SEL. This is a novel contribution beyond CASEL's original focus on learners' personal SECs while overlooking teachers' instructional competence for SEL. Based on this framework, the study has developed an observation sheet and questionnaire to investigate pre-service teachers' training experiences, perceptions and practices in SEL. These instruments can be used or adapted for similar educational contexts, fostering broader advancements in SEL research, policy and practice.

Practically, the study offers a coherent set of evidence-based recommendations that can guide reforms in teacher education policy, curriculum design and instructional practice in Vietnam and similar CHC contexts. Findings reveal how pre-service teachers perceive and practise SEL as well as the role of the teacher education program in shaping these perceptions and practices. These findings can inform curriculum developers, policymakers and teacher educators in developing training modules, assessment tools and professional development courses that can promote SEL in teacher education. In the long run, it is hoped that this study will inspire continued research, sustainable practices and collective commitment toward a more holistic approach to teacher education, which not only equips future educators with language proficiency and pedagogical skills but also nurtures their own SECs as well as their capacity to foster SECs in their students, contributing to the realization of the national goals for holistic student development.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, each of which addresses specific aspects of the study's aim and objectives.

Chapter 1 – Introduction - sets out the background, rationale, research aim, objectives and research questions. It also discusses the scope as well as the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review - reviews the relevant existing literature on SEL. It focuses on SEL definitions, approaches, benefits and implementation around the world. The chapter also reviews teachers' perceptions, practices and training in SEL. Additionally, it discusses the relevance of SEL in EFL classrooms and in the Vietnamese educational context. Finally, it identifies the research gaps that the current study aims to address.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology - details the research philosophy, research approach and research design used to achieve the study's objectives. It justifies and describes in detail the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design and the data collection techniques, including document analysis, interviews, focus group, classroom observations and questionnaire. The chapter ends with a detailed discussion on the strategies for ensuring the rigor of the research.

Chapter 4 - Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in SEL – explores how SEL is addressed in the EFL teacher education program of VPU. It examines the SEL skills covered in the curricula, teacher trainers' perspectives on SEL training, and the strategies for fostering SEL skills for pre-service teachers. This exploration sets the context for understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 - Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of SEL – investigates pre-service EFL teachers' awareness and understanding of SEL, their familiarity with SEL concepts. It also explores their perceptions of the benefits of SEL, barriers, their roles and preparedness for SEL and their training need.

Chapter 6 - Pre-service EFL Teachers' Practices in SEL – analyzes pre-service EFL teachers' demonstration of the five core SECs as well as their practices in SEL instructional competence. It also examines how the program shapes their perceptions and practices based on both qualitative and quantitative data analysis results.

Chapter 7 - Discussion and Conclusion - summarizes and discusses the major findings of the study. It also offers recommendations for enhancing SEL in EFL teacher education. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the limitations of the study and directions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses the concepts, theories and debates related to SEL. The review begins by situating SEL within broader CHC background and prevalent views of learning to provide a foundational understanding of the context for SEL integration. It then transitions to a detailed review of SEL theories, teachers' perceptions of SEL, their actual practices and their training in SEL. The review continues with portraying the picture of SEL implementation around the world and then in Vietnam. Finally, the relevance of SEL for EFL instruction and teacher education is discussed. Throughout the review, I note the minimal focus on the perceptions and practices of pre-service teachers and also the limited research on the application of SEL in EFL instruction and teacher education. It is this gap to which I aim to contribute by exploring how pre-service EFL teachers perceive SEL, how they practise SEL in their professional learning, and how the teacher education program shapes their perceptions and practices.

2.1. Prevalent Views of Learning

This section discusses prevalent views of learning and how they influence educational practices. It starts with reviewing Confucian heritage culture (CHC) and then major learning theories such as behaviorism, constructivism and cognitivism to contextualize the integration of SEL into CHC countries like Vietnam. The section continues with theories of social intelligence, multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence. Understanding SEL in relation to these views and theories helps identify how SEL complements contemporary educational methods to educate the whole child.

2.1.1. Learning in Confucian heritage culture countries

Confucian heritage culture (CHC) countries like China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam have educational systems strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy (Nguyen et al., 2006; Taylor, 2002). Confucianism places a strong emphasis on respect for authority, hard work, moral and intellectual education. These values have been deeply integrated in the educational system; therefore, Western scholars often stereotype CHC classrooms as large class sizes, reliance on high-stakes examinations, a rigid learning climate, teacher-centred pedagogy, student compliance and traditional teaching methods such as drill, rote learning and expository teaching. CHC learners are often portrayed as "passive learners" and "surface learners" who lack critical thinking skills (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Tanaka, 2020). These stereotypical generalizations are sometimes accepted within CHC countries themselves (Ryan & Louie, 2007).

Recognizing these limitations, CHC countries have conducted continuous educational reforms to address the limitations of traditional teaching methods and promote a more learner-centered education. The 1979 Reform was an early effort to modernize education by combining practical learning with theoretical knowledge (Political Bureau, 1979). This reform, however, was hindered by systemic issues such as low teacher salaries, inadequate facilities and a lack of quality teacher training. The 2000 Curriculum Reform was another effort to transform the education system by focusing on educating knowledge, skills and attitudes for students. However, due to the persistent traditional educational philosophies and routines, rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction continued to dominate the classroom (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Saito et al., 2008; Kataoka et al., 2020; Tanaka, 2020).

The Vietnamese 2018 National Education Curriculum marks a transformative transition from traditional knowledge transmission to a competency-based education approach (MOET, 2018). Influenced by global developments, including industrial revolutions and socio-environmental challenges, the curriculum aim to balance moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education, fostering both qualities and competencies for students. Educational principles include holistic development, a competency-based approach, flexibility, integration and sustainability. The ultimate goal is to create a learning environment which can promote physical and mental harmony and nurture active, confident and lifelong learners who are capable of contributing to national development. Despite these progressive goals, the extent of successful implementation requires further evaluation (Tran & Le, 2023).

In contemporary CHC countries, the influence of Confucianism is still evident; academic success remains highly valued (Vu, 2022). This results in students facing intense pressure to prepare for and perform well in tests and examinations, paying little attention to emotional well-being, autonomy, creativity and critical thinking (Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Tanaka, 2020; Kataoka et al., 2020). To address these persisting challenges, CHC countries need to seek ways to combine traditional educational values with modern pedagogical strategies to ensure student holistic development.

2.1.2. Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, Humanism and Social Learning Theory

Learning has been defined and explained in various ways across different theoretical frameworks. This section discusses some of the most prevalent views of learning to understand how knowledge is acquired, retained and applied, and to understand how SEL can facilitate these various processes.

Firstly, *Behaviorism* suggests that learning is a change in behaviors influenced by environmental stimuli. It asserts that behaviors followed by positive reinforcement are more likely to be repeated, whereas those followed by punishment are less likely

(Skinner, 1953). Behaviorism has formed instructional strategies like repetition, drills and practice to shape and reinforce desired behaviors. However, critics argue that Behaviorism oversimplifies the learning process as it overemphasizes observable behaviors rather than internal cognitive and emotional processes.

Cognitivism emerged as a response to the limitations of behaviorism. It focuses on the mental processes involved in learning and how learners actively acquire, process, organize and retrieve information (Bruner, 1960; Anderson, 1983). Cognitivist principles have profoundly influenced education and favoured practices such as concept mapping, metacognitive strategies and differentiated instruction. However, it has been criticized for focusing too much on the individual's cognitive process and less on the social context in which learning occurs.

Constructivism, unlike cognitivism, emphasizes the role of social interaction, collaboration, ideas negotiation, shared experiences, knowledge construction and cultural factors in the learning process (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism has led to educational innovations such as inquiry-based learning, project-based learning and the integration of real-world contexts into the classroom (Fosnot, 2005). However, Kirschner et al. (2006) argue that its reliance on learners' active engagement can pose challenges in resource-constrained environments, where, due to insufficient instructional support, students may fail to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Moving beyond cognitive and social considerations, Humanism focuses on the learner as a whole person. It stresses the role of personal development, self-actualization and intrinsic motivation in learning. Major humanist theories, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and Rogers' learner-centered education (1969), propose that learning is most effective when the learning environment respects and nurtures the learner's emotional and psychological needs. Although humanism's focus on personal development may be less effective in standardized education systems, its contributions to understanding the emotional and motivational aspects of learning are valuable.

Social learning theory was introduced by Albert Bandura to bridge the gap between behaviorism and cognitivism. This theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation and modeling in the learning process (Bandura, 1977). This theory is especially relevant in today's classrooms, where collaborative learning and peer interactions are encouraged to facilitate the learning process. However, as it emphasizes the influence of social factors, it might overlook the individual's factors in actively interpreting and integrating observed behaviors into their cognitive process (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012).

Finally, Connectivism, a relatively recent theory proposed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes, highlights the huge impact of the digital age, for example social networks, on learning. In this theory, learning is no longer an individual activity but a

process of connecting information sources across networks (Siemens, 2005). It emphasizes the individual ability to access, use and form connections in the digital era, where information is abundant and continuously evolving (Downes, 2012). This context requires learners to embrace competencies such as self-management and responsible decision-making to handle the dynamic and overwhelming flow of digital information.

In summary, each of the learning theories discussed above offer unique explanation on specific aspects of the learning process: Behaviorism focuses on observable behaviors; Cognitivism emphasizes the inner cognitive processes; Constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing knowledge; Humanism prioritizes personal development and emotional well-being; Social learning theory emphasizes observational learning in social contexts; and Connectivism handles the complexities of learning in a networked, digital world. No single theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the learning process. SEL may contribute to filling this gap as it acknowledges the interconnectedness of social and emotional dimensions with cognitive development to ensure a more holistic educational experience for learners.

2.1.3. Social Intelligence, Multiple Intelligences and Emotional Intelligence

Research on intelligence has evolved strongly over the last centuries and expanded our understanding of what is called intelligence. This section examines social intelligence, multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence because these theories provide a more comprehensive understanding of human intelligence that extends beyond logical reasoning and linguistic abilities.

First, *Multiple Intelligences Theory*, developed by Howard Gardner in 1983. challenges the traditional view of a singular and general intelligence. This theory suggests that intelligence can be categorized into different types such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic intelligences. This theory has had a significant impact on educational practices as it advocates for differentiated instruction that pay equal attention to different learning styles and strengths of learners (Gardner, 1983).

Another important concept is *social intelligence*, which was introduced by Edward Thorndike in the early 20th century to address the ability to understand and manage complex social relationships (Thorndike, 1920). Social intelligence includes skills such as empathy, social awareness and relationship management, which are necessary for engaging in social interactions effectively. Research shows that individuals with high social intelligence are more likely to excel in leadership roles, interpersonal communication and teamwork (Goleman, 2017).

Then, *Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory*, developed by Salovey and Mayer and popularized by Daniel Goleman in the 1990s, further extends our understanding of intelligence. EI refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions effectively in oneself and others (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman's EI model identifies five core components, namely self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, which are important for personal and professional success as they can influence how individuals manage their emotions, communicate and build relationships with others. EI theory has influenced education significantly and it has been studied and integrated into educational curricula to promote student learning.

Overall, these theories of intelligence offer a broader and more inclusive understanding of human intelligence. Specifically, multiple intelligences acknowledge different types of intelligences; social intelligence emphasizes interpersonal interactions; and emotional intelligence emphasizes the roles of effective emotion management. Although these theories focus on different aspects of intelligence, actually they complement one another and advocate for educational strategies that recognize and nurture various social, emotional and cognitive skills for students. In this respect, they align well with the principles of SE and provide a strong rationale for integrating SEL into education.

2.2. The Understanding of Social Emotional Learning

This section explores the concept of Social Emotional Learning (SEL), the various interpretations of the term, approaches to implementing SEL in educational settings, guidelines for ensuring effective practices and its wide-ranging benefits.

2.2.1. Definitions and Interpretations of the term "Social Emotional Learning"

The concept of "Social Emotional Learning" (SEL) was coined in a meeting in 1994 hosted by the Fetzer Institute, where researchers and educators raised concerns about ineffective school programs. This meeting led to the establishment of SEL as a framework aimed at aligning and coordinating school programs to meet the comprehensive needs of students. Also at this meeting, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded as a leading organization for SEL. Its mission is to advance SEL research, policies and practices (CASEL, 2020).

CASEL (2020) defines SEL as *"the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships and make responsible and caring decisions."* As the definition mentions both children and adults, it emphasizes that SEL is relevant across the lifespan, not only in educational settings but also in broader contexts (Durlak et al., 2011).

Different skills of SEL are present within many educational subfields, each of which use their own terms, for instance, life skills (Kautz et al., 2014), soft or non-cognitive skills (Farrington et al., 2012), meta-cognitive skills, 21st-century skills, civic and character education, holistic education and intrapersonal, social skills training, citizenship education, bullying prevention, health education and promotion; mental health and well-being (Cefai et al., 2018). These alternative terms show different aspects and perspectives related to SEL, but they all aim to support the holistic development of individuals (CASEL, 2020; Pentón Herrera, 2020).

However, these overlapping terminologies can create confusion as many interrelated terms have been used to refer to social and emotional skills (Farrington et al., 2012). Generally, these terms have not been defined with consistency or clarity; different researchers and practitioners use different terms to refer to similar skills, leading to confusion and inconsistencies in research and practice (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). This issue requires the development of a clear taxonomy and coherent framework to guide research and practice in this field. Without coherent conceptualization, it becomes challenging to improve and assess these skills effectively (Farrington et al., 2012).

Among the existing frameworks, the CASEL's framework for systematic SEL stands out as a structured and comprehensive framework for SEL (Elias et al., 1997). It outlines specific and actionable components of SEL, including five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. This well-structured and comprehensive framework can address the inconsistencies and confusion noted above by offering a common language and set of practices that can be universally understood and applied.

The concept of SEL has evolved over the decades and has been interpreted in different ways. For example, Pentón Herrera (2021) claims that SEL is "a process, not a program". When viewing SEL as a process, Pentón Herrera wants to emphasize its integrative, dynamic and continuous nature within educational contexts rather than a one-time intervention. This perspective suggests that SEL should be integrated into the educational experiences and continually adapted to foster a more holistic development for students rather than being viewed as a discrete or supplementary program.

Similarly, Huynh (2019) analyzed the term SEL and broke it into three fundamental aspects, namely the social, emotional and learning dimensions. The social aspect focuses on the ability to establish and nurture harmonious interactions with the external world, including friends, teachers, family members and community. The emotional aspect centers on the ability to recognize, understand and manage their own emotions. Since emotions always occur in relation to others or in response to social events (Burkitt, 2014), the social and emotional aspects of this concept are interrelated and cannot be separated.

The learning dimension of the SEL model represents the ongoing process of developing SECs. It means that these competencies are not static; they can be learned, acquired and refined over time through instruction, practice and constructive feedback.

As discussed above, Huynh (2019) interprets the "learning" aspect of SEL as the process of learning or developing SECs. However, I would like to propose another interpretation. In my opinion, the word "learning" implies that SEL should be considered a lens for us to view learning and teaching. Here, SEL is not merely about learning and developing SECs but also about integrating its principles into every step of the learning process. This interpretation views SEL as an integral element that influences how teaching and learning is conducted. This perspective aligns with Markowitz et al. (2016), who also view SEL as a lens through which learning and teaching occur.

According to Markowitz et al. (2016), SEL should be viewed as a lens through which teaching and learning occurs, rather than being treated as an isolated or add-on component. SEL informs how teachers design their lesson plans, give instructions, interact with their students and assess the educational outcomes. Rather than using the term SEL, they advocates for the term "social and emotional dimensions of teaching and learning" (SEDTL) to emphasize the interconnectedness of social and emotional development in both teachers and their students and how these dimensions significantly influence the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it is necessary to explicitly address SECs of not only students but also the teachers.

In the current study, SEL is interpreted both as a process of developing SECs and as a lens through which learning and teaching occur. SEL integrates, mobilizes, activates and enhances SECs in the educational process to facilitate learning and teaching. Instead of viewing SEL as a set of isolated SECs to be developed separately, this interpretation emphasizes incorporating SEL principles into all aspects of teaching and learning to create a more holistic and supportive learning environment for students.

2.2.2. Approaches to Social Emotional Learning

CASEL's researchers have identified four approaches to promoting SEL in education, including free-standing SEL lessons, integration into academic content, integration into general teaching practices, and SEL as a school-wide campaign (Dusenbury et al., 2015). These four approaches differ in their degree of explicitness, organisational format and scope of implementation; however, together they can form a coherent system of macro- and micro-level strategies to ensure sustainable SEL implementation.

The first approach is to conduct free-standing lessons that are separate from the academic curriculum and focus explicitly on teaching SEL skills. Teachers can use active learning techniques such as discussions, group work and role plays to keep students engaged and provide explicit instruction and opportunities for students to practice SEL

skills throughout the lesson (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Research indicates that students participating in free-standing SEL programs show significant improvements in social behavior, emotional regulation and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). However, Greenberg et al. (2003) pointed out if SEL is presented separately from the academic curriculum, teachers and students may fail to see the important connection between SEL and academic learning. They may view SEL as an additional task rather than an integrated dimension of teaching and learning. This isolation limits opportunities for students to activate and apply SEL skills in diverse learning tasks. Consequently, SEL may be deprioritized or omitted from the curriculum (Martinez, 2016).

A second approach is to integrates SEL directly into academic content. For example, in a reading comprehension lesson, teachers could encourage students to focus on the characters' emotions, motivations and interpersonal relationships to foster their empathy, emotional intelligence and social awareness. This approach creates more opportunities for students to practice and apply SEL skills during the learning process. It tells students that SEL is not a separate element but an integral aspect of teaching and learning (Markowitz et al., 2016). Moreover, it saves instructional time as it can incorporate SEL into existing lesson plans. It can also enhance student engagement as they are more likely to see the relevance of SEL in real-world contexts (Taylor et al., 2017). However, effective SEL integration requires teachers to be capable of identifying and creating opportunities to teach SEL within their academic lessons (Huynh et al., 2022). This necessitates SEL training and ongoing support for teachers.

A third approach is to integrate SEL into gneral teaching practices throughout the day via class routines, activities and structures (Dusenbury et al., 2015). In this approach teachers should use establish positive classroom environments where both students and teachers establish classroom rules, routines and structures such as listening actively and respectfully when others are speaking. In addition, teachers should promote positive teacher-student relationships, for example, by building supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and students and among peers. Furthermore, teachers can use collaborative learning strategies and problem-based learning in which students are promoted to work together. Teachers can also use effective and genuine feedback for students, encourage students' genuine voice and create opportunities for them to explore and develop their own interests and potentials.

The fourth approach views SEL as a whole-school initiative. Unlike the above-mentioned three approaches, which focus on the classroom level, this approach integrates SEL into policies, classroom practices, extracurricular activities and community engagement. (Dusenbury et al., 2015). In this approach, SEL takes place not just inside but also outside the classroom (LaRusso et al., 2009). For example, school

administrators need to build a leadership team for SEL, create a school-wide vision for SEL, select evidence-based SEL programs for school implementation, integrate SEL into all aspects of the school's functioning and conduct professional development for all staff on SEL, etc. According to Weissberg and Cascarino (2013), addressing SEL at the whole-school level is important because effective implementation of SEL programs require strong support of school administrators, the active participation and collaboration of all staff members, teachers and students.

These four main approaches to SEL can be implemented individually or in combination, depending on the needs and goals of the students and educational institutions. The ultimate goal is to provide opportunities for students to develop SECs in order to support their personal and academic success. Within the scope of the current study, the second and third approaches (integrating SEL into academic content and general teaching practices) were adopted as they address SEL at the classroom and English-subject levels.

2.2.3. Guidelines for effective Social Emotional Learning implementation

According to Durlak et al. (2011), effective SEL implementation principles can be represented by the acronym SAFE, which stands for Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit. Following these principles, educators can ensure that SEL is not left implicit, fragmented or incidental.

The first component, *Sequenced*, indicates that SEL programs should follow a structured, coordinated and connected set of activities designed to foster skill development in a step-by-step manner. Furthermore, SEL programs should be adapted to the developmental needs of the target population, so they need to take into account factors such as age, cultural background and individual characteristics (Denham et al., 2009). The second component, *Active*, emphasizes the importance of employing active instructional methods for SEL. This means that students should be involved in practical and interactive activities that allow them to actively practice and master SEL skills. Interactive exercises, role-playing and hands-on projects are examples of active learning methods that can help students develop and apply SECs.

The third component, *Focused*, highlights the need for SEL programs to dedicate specific time and attention to developing SECs. This focus ensures that SEL is not just an incidental, optional or secondary add-on to the curriculum but an integral part of the educational experience. Therefore, teachers should allocate sufficient time and resources to address the various SECs comprehensively. Finally, *Explicit* SEL instruction involves clearly defining and explicitly communicating the skills being taught so that students can understand what they are learning and why it is important. This clarity helps students recognize and articulate their SEL skills and apply these them in an explicit manner.

2.2.4. Benefits of Social Emotional Learning

Research has consistently demonstrated that SEL programs bring about numerous benefits for students, teachers and society as a whole. These benefits include improved academic performance, increased emotional well-being, enhanced positive relationships, reduced negative behaviors and long-term success in personal and professional life.

Firstly, SEL can enhance students' social and emotional skills. These skills can help them foster positive interactions, communication, cooperation, relationships and a greater sense of belonging (Zins et al., 2004). Meta-analyses by Frey et al. (2019) and Mahoney et al. (2018) provide empirical evidence of SEL's positive impacts on social skills, resilience, responsible decision-making and well-being. Developing strong social emotional skills enables students to view challenges as growth opportunities, foster academic success and overall development (Dresser, 2013).

Secondly, SEL helps reduce behavioral problems among students as it can equip them with essential skills for emotion regulation, problem-solving and conflict resolution (Elias et al., 1997). The development of these self-management and relationship skills enables students to avoid negative behaviors which can disrupt their learning and social experiences such as bullying, substance abuse and violence (CASEL, 2020). SEL also leads to increased prosocial behaviors, fewer absences and suspensions from school (Zins et al, 2004). All of these help create a more focused and productive classroom environment, and enhance the overall learning experience for all students.

Thirdly, SEL promotes positive health outcomes for students by providing them with strategies to cope with stress, anxiety and mental health issues, thereby reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Catalano et al., 2003). Long-term benefits include better mental health and functioning, with effects lasting up to 15 years post-intervention. In some cases, social and emotional skills even predict longevity more strongly than cognitive skills and socio-economic status (Hawkins et al., 2008).

Fourthly, SEL contributes to building a positive classroom environment by creating a more compassionate, inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere, strong relationships, active engagement, psychological safety and confidence . Positive relationships between students and teachers, along with a sense of belonging are important for creating a culture of kindness and inclusivity (Denham et al., 2012; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Jones et al., 2013), which, in turn, can enhance motivation to learn and improve academic engagement (Zins & Elias, 2007). In addition, SEL can also promote equity, reduce disparities and narrow the achievement gap (Frey et al., 2019).

Fifthly, SEL contributes significantly to academic performance. Schools may be hesitant to implement SEL due to the pressure to improve academic scores; however, research

consistently shows that SEL can enhance academic outcomes across all subjects and grade levels. SEL equips students with self-regulation, goal-setting, problem-solving skills and responsible decision-making, which can not only improve attendance and engagement but also foster perseverance and resilience when facing academic challenges (Zins et al., 2004; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Brackett et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017). Meta-analyses further support these claims, showing improvements in grades, test scores and reduced dropout rates (Durlak et al., 2011).

Sixthly, SEL prepares students for future employability and career success. Research confirms SEL's role in developing important workplace skills like emotional intelligence, communication, adaptability, problem-solving and goal setting, which are increasingly desired by employers to meet modern workforce demands (Goleman, 2017; Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Therefore, integrating SEL into education not only promotes personal development, academic achievements but also prepares students for success in their future professional settings.

Finally, SEL has long-lasting effects on individuals and the society. Research findings show that individuals who develop strong SECs tend to achieve higher educational attainment, greater career satisfaction and improved overall well-being later in life. For instance, Denham et al. (2012) found that participants in SEL interventions during kindergarten displayed a notable decrease in psychological and behavioral issues by age 25 compared to the control groups. Similarly, Jones et al. (2013) suggest that early prosocial skills correlate positively with higher educational progress and better employment outcomes later in adulthood.

In summary, SEL has wide-ranging positive impacts on individuals and society, including improved academic performance, enhanced social skills and relationships, increased emotional intelligence, reduced behavioral issues, positive school climate, long-term success and well-being and promotion of equity and reduced disparities, better mental health and greater career success. For this study, these benefits highlight why SEL must be understood and practised not only by students but also by teachers.

2.3. Social Emotional Competencies

At the heart of SEL lie the five core social-emotional competencies (SECs), namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). SECs are increasingly recognized as important in educational settings, where they contribute to social-emotional development and academic achievement. This section focuses on the interpretations of the five core SECs, the development and assessment of SECs and the components of teachers' SECs and SEL instructional competence.

2.3.1. Interpretations of the five core social emotional competencies

Social emotional competence can be defined as "the ability to understand, manage and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development (Elias et al..1997, p. 2). This definition is comprehensive and highlights the significance of these competencies in various aspects of life such as emotions, relationships and tasks.

Figure 1 outlines CASEL's 2020 framework of five core SECs, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Each of these competencies comprises specific skills that contribute to both social and emotional development.

Figure 1
CASEL's Framework of Five Core SECs (2020)

SELF-AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose. Such as:
- Integrating personal and social identities
- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
- Identifying one's emotions
- Demonstrating honesty and integrity
- Linking feelings, values, and thoughts
- Examining prejudices and biases
- Experiencing self-efficacy
- Having a growth mindset
- Developing interests and a sense of purpose

SELF-MANAGEMENT: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation & agency to accomplish personal/collective goals. Such as:
- Managing one's emotions
- Identifying and using stress-management strategies
- Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation
- Setting personal and collective goals
- Using planning and organizational skills
- Showing the courage to take initiative
- Demonstrating personal and collective agency

SOCIAL AWARENESS: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports. Such as:
- Taking others' perspectives
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Understanding and expressing gratitude
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
- Understanding the influences of organizations/systems on behavior

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed. Such as:
- Communicating effectively
- Developing positive relationships
- Demonstrating cultural competency
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- Resolving conflicts constructively
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Showing leadership in groups
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed
- Standing up for the rights of others

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being. Such as:
- Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
- Identifying solutions for personal and social problems
- Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, facts
- Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions
- Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside & outside of school
- Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being
- Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

Self-awareness is defined as accurately recognizing one's beliefs, views, feelings, interests, values, weaknesses and strengths and maintaining confidence and optimism (CASEL, 2020). Individuals who are self-aware are able to understand how their thoughts, feelings and behaviors are connected and how these elements impact themselves and others. This self-awareness enables them to manage their emotions and behaviors more effectively and make more informed decisions (Dymnicki et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011).

Self-management is defined as effectively regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately" (CASEL, 2020). Self-management involves emotion regulation, self-discipline, stress management, goal setting and organizational skills (Dymnicki et al., 2013). Notably, self-management shares some similarities with the concept of self-regulated learning, where individuals take responsibility for their own learning by setting goals, monitoring progress and maintaining focus despite obstacles (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012).

Social awareness is defined as the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognize and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences; and recognize and use family, school and community resources" (CASEL, 2020). Social awareness is essential for developing prosocial behaviors such as empathy, respect, collaboration and effective communication and conflict prevention. Moreover, good social awareness skills allow individuals to identify and mobilize available resources within their communities to support their growth (Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Relationship skills involve establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on clear communication, active listening, cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing and resolving interpersonal conflicts; and seeking help when needed (CASEL, 2020). With good relationship skills, individuals can effectively and harmoniously interact with others in various types of romantic, family, friendships and professional relationships (Dymnicki et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011). Developing these skills is important for students, who need to learn to cooperate with peers, manage conflicts and seek assistance when necessary.

Responsible decision-making involves making responsible decisions by considering ethical standards, safety, social norms, respect for others and likely consequences of various actions (CASEL, 2020). With these skills, individuals can evaluate situations carefully, weigh the impact of their decisions on themselves and others, and act in ways that align with their values and the well-being of those around them (Dymnicki et al., 2013). In an academic situation, good responsible decision-making skills allow a student to identify problems, analyze the situations and generate the best solution to the problems (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Zins et al., 2004).

It can be seen that SECs are composed of both social and emotional competencies, which work together and build upon each other (Denham et al., 2014). Self-awareness lays the foundation as understanding one's own emotions, interests, strengths and weaknesses, individuals can better manage behaviors and make informed decisions. Self-management builds on self-awareness and involves regulating emotions, setting goals and practicing self-discipline. Social awareness expands on self-awareness by focusing on understanding others' perspectives, empathizing with their emotions and appreciating diversity. Relationship skills depend on self-awareness, self-management and social awareness to achieve effective communication, cooperation and conflict resolution. Responsible decision-making integrates all four previous competencies as it involves considering ethical values, analyzing potential consequences, evaluating situations from multiple perspectives and making choices that contribute to personal well-being and the well-being of others. The interdependence among these competencies indicates the need to develop all of these competencies holistically (Denham et al., 2014).

2.3.2. Development and assessment of social emotional competencies

SECs are widely acknowledged as a teachable set of attributes that should be fostered in individuals (Greenberg et al. 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Earlier scholars often describe these qualities as "traits" to imply their fixed and permanent nature. However, today, researchers view them as "skills" because they can be actively developed and changed over time through education and life experiences (Durlak et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2019). This perspective emphasizes the role of intentional instruction, feedback and support to develop these skills rather than being left implicit or assumed to emerge naturally.

Research has provided empirical evidence to support that SECs are not fixed traits but behaviors that can be taught and learned through education and various life experiences. For example, Durlak et al. (2011) used rigorous methods to assess the impact of SEL programs on social, emotional and academic outcomes. Sklad et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis further quantified and affirmed the significant impact of SEL programs on social and emotional skills, prosocial behavior, academic achievement and other variables. These findings confirm that SECs can be fostered through targeted interventions.

The measurement of SECs has also gained significant attention recently (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). Various methods and instruments have been developed and used to assess SECs, including both self-report measures and external evaluations. One commonly used method is the self-report scale. However, self-reports may raise concerns about potential biases and social desirability (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). To overcome these limitations, researchers have turned to other more objective methods such as peer assessments, performance-based assessments, situational judgement tests and behavior observation. These types of assessment often provide a more objective measure of actual SECs; however, they can be costly and time-consuming.

When assessing SECs, it is important to consider certain principles to ensure the assessment is effective and meaningful. These principles include inclusivity, authenticity and multimodality (Weissberg et al., 2015; Merrell, 2011). In the context of my study, I chose a triangulation approach and combined multiple assessment methods for a comprehensive and accurate understanding of pre-service teachers' SECs, including self-report, teacher assessment and classroom observations.

2.3.3. Teachers' social emotional competencies

As classrooms are inherently social and emotional spaces, teachers' SECs are increasingly recognized as important for effective teaching and student success. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) define teachers' SECs as the ability to identify and regulate their own and their students' emotions, maintain positive relationships, manage teaching stresses, model fairness and prosocial behavior and make responsible decisions. They also explained each of the five core SECs. *Self-awareness* involves teachers understanding their own feelings, values and strengths and recognizing how these factors affect teaching and interactions with students. *Self-management* refers to teachers' ability to regulate their emotions and behaviors, which help them handle the emotional demands of the teaching. *Social awareness* is the ability to understand and empathize with others' perspectives and feelings, appreciating diversity and individual differences. *Relationship skills* involve interacting effectively with students, parents and colleagues, handling conflicts with empathy. *Responsible decision-making* involves making thoughtful decisions to manage the classroom and support student holistic development.

Despite the recognized importance of teachers' SECs, research show that SECs are not always prioritized in teacher training programs (Corcoran and Tormey, 2012; Tran & Le, 2023). Waajid et al. (2013) pointed out the limited priority given to SECs development in teacher education programs and called for reform in the curriculum to include more opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop these skills. Similarly, Marlow and Inman (2001) investigated the emphasis on SECs in 68 teacher training institutions. Their findings reveal that more than 60% of the institutions did not explicitly mention SECs in their mission statements or admission policies and less than half of the institutions offered courses dedicated to developing SECs for pre-service teachers. These findings suggest a systemic underestimation of SECs in teacher education programs.

However, recent studies have begun to address this gap and emphasized the importance of integrating SECs into teacher preparation. For instance, Garner et al. (2018) demonstrated the positive impact of mindfulness and SEL interventions in improving pre-service teachers' emotional awareness and regulation. Similarly, Peck et al. (2015) demonstrated the positive impact of SECs development on pre-service teachers' well-being, job satisfaction and the overall learning environment. For this reason, teacher education must attend to pre-service teachers' own SECs.

2.3.4. Teachers' SEL instructional competence

This section moves beyond teachers' personal SECs to review their SEL instructional competence. As have been discussed in section 2.3.3, SECs refer to the social–emotional skills that teachers themselves possess to recognise, regulate and express their own emotions, to empathise with others, to build positive relationships and to make responsible decisions. Meanwhile, SEL instructional competence refer to a set of knowledge and skills that teachers need to intentionally integrate SEL into teaching practices. Several scholars have proposed different frameworks and interpretations to define and operationalize SEL instructional competence.

Huynh et al. (2022) introduced the term "the competence to apply SEL in teaching Ethics" for pre-service teachers and defined this competence as the ability to identify practical issues in Ethics education that relate to SEL and translate theoretical knowledge of SEL into practical applications to develop students' SECs through structured lesson plans and specific student activities. They also specified the components of this competence, including understanding SEL principles and SEL-based teaching methods, and designing lesson plans in alignment with SEL principles. It can be seen that Huynh et al.'s framework emphasizes the need for pre-service teachers to both understand and apply SEL principles in their teaching practices.

Having built the framework, Huynh et al. (2022) developed a questionnaire to assess the ability to integrate SEL into teaching of 1.100 pre-service teachers majoring in Primary Education from six universities across Vietnam. The results reveal that these pre-service teachers generally had an average competence to apply SEL. Many pre-service teachers could not recognize, distinguish and apply SEL concepts in their teaching effectively. The researchers highlighted that these difficulties result from a lack of understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of SEL. For instance, pre-service teachers did not adequately grasped the theoretical foundations of SEL, nor did they develop the appropriate pedagogical methods to effectively integrate SEL into their teaching practices. This gap in knowledge and skills indicates a need for more SEL training to better prepare future teachers (Huynh et al., 2022).

Phan (2021) did not use any specific term related to "SEL instructional competence", but she proposed "contents of SEL training for preschool teachers" to train them in incorporating SEL principles into teaching practices. Three main content areas are outlined, including awareness of SEL, ability to organize SEL activities to develop SECs for children, and ability to evaluate SEL activities. Phan's framework provides a structured approach to preparing preschool teachers to integrate SEL effectively into their classrooms. Although she doesn't explicitly use the term "SEL instructional competence," the content areas she outlines cover the fundamental aspects of what constitutes SEL instructional competence.

Unlike Huynh et al. (2022) and Phan (2021), Jennings and Greenberg (2009) emphasize the importance of teachers' own SECs in promoting effective SEL instruction. Jennings and Greenberg claim that teachers with strong SECs are better equipped to manage the social and emotional dimensions of the classroom, model appropriate behaviors and create a supportive learning environment for their students. This view is supported by Lawlor (2016), who pointed out the reciprocal relationship between teachers' SECs and their SEL instructional competence. Teachers who are socially and emotionally competent are more likely to be sensitive to their students' social and emotional needs, so they are more willing and able to model and foster SECs in students (Cefai et al., 2018; Markowitz, & Bouffard, 2020; Stephanie et al., 2013; Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

Unlike Huynh et al. (2022) and Phan (2021), who focused primarily on teachers' knowledge and instructional design capacities, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) highlight the foundational role of teachers' own social-emotional competencies (SECs) in shaping effective SEL instruction. They argue that teachers with strong self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship skills are not only better able to manage the social-emotional dynamics of the classroom but also more capable of authentically modeling SEL for students and cultivating a supportive, safe learning environment. This perspective shifts the focus from what teachers know and do to who teachers are, underscoring that SEL cannot be reduced to technical skills but is deeply tied to teachers' own dispositions and practices.

Based on international frameworks by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), CASEL (2020), Lawlor (2016), as well as recent Vietnamese studies on teacher preparation by Huynh et al. (2022) and Phan (2021), the current study proposed the concept of "SEL Instructional Competence" for pre-service EFL teachers, aiming to equip them with both theoretical knowledge (psychology, pedagogy, SEL principles) and practical skills (modeling, designing, and assessing SEL) to effectively integrate SEL principles into their teaching practices. Figure 2 and Table 1 provide a clear and structured outline of the five components of the SEL instructional competence. These components were examined and validated later based on the preliminary data from curriculum analysis, interviews, classroom observations and questionnaire (see section 4.1.3).

In the current study, SEL instructional competence (SELIC) can be defined as a professional pedagogical competence of teachers to understand and integrate SEL principles into their teaching practices, design and implement SEL activities to develop social and emotional skills for students and effectively assess and support students' SECs. This definition highlights the importance of a balanced approach that integrates conceptual understanding, practical application and continuous assessment to effectively nurture students' social and emotional growth, alongside their academic achievements.

Figure 2
Components of SEL Instructional Competence
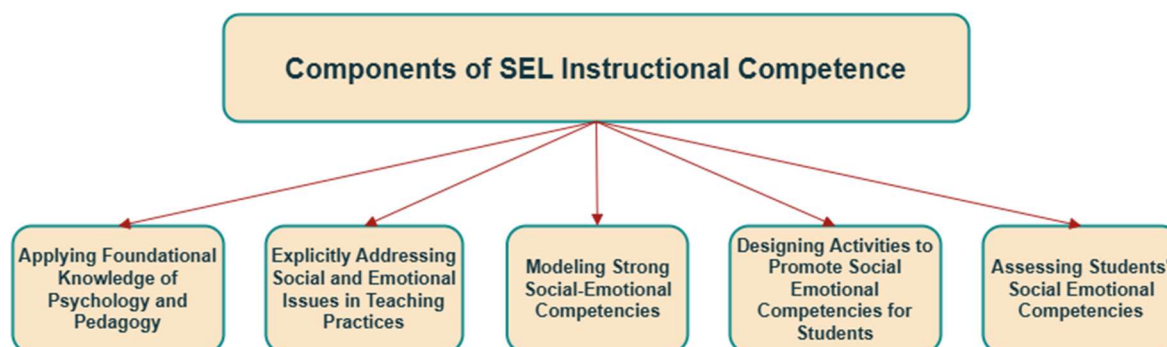
SEL instructional competence involves several interconnected components (see Table 1). Firstly, teachers must apply their knowledge of psychology and pedagogy to create a supportive learning environment that can address both the cognitive and psychological needs of students. Next, they need to comprehend and apply the principles and concepts of SEL explicitly in practical teaching. Then, they need to transform SEL knowledge into specific teaching plans and learning activities such as cooperative learning, problem-solving, conflict resolution and mindfulness activities to mobilize, activate and promote SECs in their students. Additionally, teachers need to model good SECs by demonstrating empathy, effective communication and emotional regulation to set a positive example for students. Finally, teachers need to assess students' SECs and use the assessment data to inform instruction.

Table 1
Components of SEL Instructional Competence

Components	Description
1. Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy	- Apply knowledge of psychology such as psychological and cognitive development theories in EFL teaching to support student social, emotional and academic development. - Apply knowledge of pedagogy such as knowledge of learning theories and instructional strategies in EFL teaching.
2. Address social and emotional issues explicitly	- Use SEL-related concepts such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making explicitly in EFL teaching practices. - Identify, acknowledge and address students' social and emotional issues in the classroom explicitly and constructively.
3. Model good SECs in EFL teaching	- Demonstrate and model social emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making in teaching practices.
4. Design activities to foster SECs for students	- Design and organize activities such as role-playing, group discussion, reflective writing, learning projects, for students to develop and practice SECs in authentic contexts.
5. Assess students' SECs	- Use appropriate tools and methods to assess students' SECs. - Utilize assessment data to provide constructive feedback, inform instruction and support students in their SECs.

SELIC Component 1: Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy

The first component of SEL instructional competence is *Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy* to design and carry out learning experiences in ways that support student social, emotional and cognitive outcomes (Daniels & Shumow, 2003; Huynh et al., 2022; Rimm- Kaufman & Hamre, 2010). Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015 claim that teachers who are knowledgeable about child development are better equipped to integrate SEL effectively. Moreover, to effectively implement SEL in the classroom, teachers must possess and apply knowledge of pedagogy, including knowledge of learning theories such as constructivism or behaviorism and instructional strategies that can meet diverse learning needs (Brown et al., 2010).

SELIC Component 2: Addressing social and emotional issues explicitly

The second component of SEL instructional competence is *Addressing social and emotional issues explicitly using SEL concepts* (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Although general knowledge of psychology and pedagogy is important, this foundational knowledge is insufficient for explicit SEL instruction. Pre-service teachers need to intentionally use explicit SEL theories and concepts in lesson plans and classroom activities. Additionally, they need to be prepared to identify, acknowledge and actively handle social and emotional issues in the classroom such as managing student anxiety or resolving conflicts. This will help create a safe and supportive classroom environment that promotes learning. Pre-service teachers also need to be familiar with specific SEL programs, practices, approaches, methods and techniques and get ready to implement those that best fit their contexts (Burgin et al., 2021; Greenberg et al., 2003).

SELIC Component 3: Model good SECs in EFL teaching

To integrate SEL into teaching, it is important for teachers to enhance and *model their own SECs* in the classroom (Braun et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lawlor, 2016; Hattie & Clark, 2019; Yoder & Gurke, 2017). This view aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which claims that individuals learn behaviors and skills by observing others. Teachers who consistently model good SECs serve as role models for students by providing them with concrete, lived examples of SEL in action. Students learn not only from what teachers say but also from how teachers act. Brackett et al., (2012), Jones et al. (2013) and Schonert-Reichl (2017) all emphasize the indispensable role of teachers' SECs in teaching and points out the necessity of fostering these skills early in their teaching preparation and providing continuous support throughout their careers. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) also suggest that pre-service education should prioritize the development of SECs to enhance both teachers' SECs and the effectiveness of implementing SEL programs.

SELIC Component 4: Design and organize activities to foster SECs for students

Huynh et al. (2022) argue that to implement SEL effectively in the classroom, teachers need to possess the ability to *design and organize activities that can foster SECs for students*. This component involves teachers' competence in planning, designing and executing classroom activities that can actively target, foster, mobilize and activate specific SEL skills such as self-regulation, conflict resolution, decision-making and empathy. For example, teachers must know how to implement student-centered discipline strategies, teacher language, responsibility and choice, warmth and support, cooperative learning, group discussions, self-reflection and self-assessment, balanced instruction, academic press and expectations (Cefai et al., 2018; Pentón Herrera, 2020; Yoder & Gurke, 2017). These activities allow students to practice SECs within real-world contexts and reinforce the relevance of SEL in their academic activities. Teachers should also evaluate the effectiveness of these activities to ensure that they are appropriately aligned with the linguistic goals of the lesson (Hawkins et al., 2008).

SELIC Component 5: Assess students' SECs

This component focuses on the teacher's ability to use suitable methods and tools for *assessing students' SECs* systematically and use the results to inform ongoing instruction. It involves the skills to choose and administer assessments that accurately measure students' progress in SECs (Dinh et al., 2021; Zhou & Ee, 2012; Zins et al., 2004). For example, teachers may utilize formative approaches (e.g., observation, reflective journals, peer feedback) and summative approaches (e.g., rubrics, self-assessment tools). (Hawkins et al., 2008). Furthermore, teachers should be able to use assessment data to inform their instruction. For example, teachers can adapt their lesson plans, modify classroom activities or provide additional support to meet the social and emotional needs of students. This process ensures that SEL is monitored, valued and continuously improved, rather than remaining an optional or incidental aspect of learning. (Huynh et al., 2022; Phan, 2021; Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

In summary, the concept of SEL instructional competence has been regarded as an essential dimension of teacher professionalism. It determines the extent to which teachers can intentionally integrate SEL into classroom practice to foster students' SECs. SEL instructional competence involves not only theoretical understanding but also their personal SECs and their instructional skills in designing, modeling and assessing SEL. As SEL continues to gain global recognition, teacher education programs need to provide systematic, explicit training in SEL instructional competence. The development of SEL instructional competence framework is therefore a timely and necessary step. It offers a conceptual and practical framework to prepare pre-service teachers to implement SEL effectively and sustainably in their future classrooms.

2.4. Teachers' Perceptions, Practices and Training in Social Emotional Learning

The literature primarily focuses on examining SEL in relation to students; however, it is important to look at SEL from teachers' perspectives (Collie et al., 2015; Jennings et al., 2017). Teachers are those who directly implement SEL in the classroom; therefore, their perceptions, practices and training directly influence its implementation.

2.4.1. Interpretations of the terms "perception" and "practice"

Perception can be defined as the process of becoming aware of organizing and interpreting sensory information to understand the real world. It involves the interaction between external stimuli and internal cognitive processes combined with the input from the five physical senses (Bodenhausen and Hugenberg, 2009). It is important to note that perceptions are subjective; different individuals may perceive the same thing differently depending on their personal filters, previous experiences and cognitive processes (Borg, 2003). This diversity can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings but also offers opportunities for learning and collaboration. In the context of the current study, the term "perception" is used to explore pre-service EFL teachers' awareness, understanding, attitudes and beliefs about SEL and how these perceptions influence their practices.

Practice is defined as *"the actual application or use of an idea, belief or method, as opposed to theories relating to it"* (Oxford Living Dictionaries online). In the field of education, Dewey (1904) explains that practice is putting ideas, beliefs or methods into action, translating educational theories into everyday classroom actions, behaviors and strategies. In this study, practice refers to the ways pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate the five core SECs and the five components of SEL instructional competence within their professional learning. These practices were self-reported by the pre-service teachers, assessed by the teacher trainers and observed in authentic classrooms.

Perceptions and practices are are closely related and mutually influential. Perceptions inform behaviors and actions while practices can reinforce and refine perceptions (Bodenhausen and Hugenberg, 2009). In the field of education, teachers' perceptions have a significant influence on their practices (Collie et al., 2015; Borg, 2003). For example, teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, their understanding of subject matter and their pedagogical knowledge all influence their instructional practices and interactions with students in the classroom.

Similarly, the presence and effectiveness of SEL in classrooms can be significantly affected by teachers' perceptions of SEL (Burgin et al., 2021; Collie et al., 2015; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers who believe that SEL is important will try to teach it to their students; on the other hand, negative or skeptical beliefs about SEL can hinder its successful implementation (Zinsser et al., 2014; Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009). Teachers' perceptions can also impact their willingness to participate in

professional development and training related to SEL. When teachers perceive SEL as valuable and relevant to their work, they are more motivated to seek out opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in this area (Schultz et al., 2010).

2.4.2. Teachers' perceptions of Social Emotional Learning

Teachers' perceptions of SEL are important for its successful implementation. Their understanding of SEL concepts, the value they place on SEL, their perceived roles in promoting it and the barriers they face all impact how SEL is integrated into their teaching practices. Exploring these perceptions helps identify the challenges and opportunities for effective SEL integration in the classroom.

2.4.2.1. Teachers' understanding of SEL concepts

Firstly, it is necessary to explore teachers' understanding of SEL concepts. Several studies such as Buchanan et al. (2009), Collie et al. (2012), Huck et al. (2023) and Talvio et al. (2013) investigated teachers' knowledge of SEL and found that teachers often have limited knowledge and understanding of SEL concepts and strategies. This lack of knowledge can hinder their ability to effectively incorporate SEL into their teaching practices. Triliva and Poulou (2006) conducted research on teachers' familiarity with different aspects of SEL and found that elementary school teachers were more familiar with the social aspects than the emotional dimensions. This finding suggests that teachers may have varying levels of familiarity with and incomplete understanding of SEL.

Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) conducted a qualitative study on Turkish elementary school teachers' familiarity with SEL. Their study reveals that most teachers interviewed had not heard about this concept, but they still conducted learning activities that could develop SECs for students. These findings suggest that although teachers may not be familiar with the specific SEL terminology, they still intuitively foster social emotional skills in their students without awareness of their practices. However, without clear frameworks, training or institutional support, these practices may remain sporadic and unintentional, and lack the depth and consistency required for long-term impact (Humphries et al., 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to provide comprehensive training to enhance teachers' understanding of SEL.

2.4.2.2. Teachers' perception of the significance of SEL

Many studies (Elias et al., 1997; Hoffman, 2009; Huck et al., 2023), consistently found that teachers believe SEL can positively impact students in many aspects such as improved social and emotional skills (e.g. self-awareness, self-regulation and social awareness); more positive and pro-social behaviors (e.g. respectful communication, conflict resolution and responsible behavior towards oneself and others); and improved academic performance (e.g. enhanced engagement, motivation, self-discipline, perseverance and academic achievement).

Bridgeland et al. (2013) conducted a national survey and confirmed these findings, revealing that teachers recognized SECs as important for students to better manage stress, stay focused on their work and develop the persistence needed to overcome challenges, all of which directly contribute to improved academic performance. Additionally, research by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) reported teachers' beliefs in the teachability and universal applicability of SEL skills, as well as the positive impact of SEL instruction on various aspects of students' lives.

In summary, research findings show a strong agreement among teachers on the importance and benefits of SEL in promoting students' social, emotional, academic and future success. This reflects a growing recognition of SEL as an integral component of education. Therefore, schools need to prioritize SEL and provide teachers with the necessary resources and support to effectively implement SEL in their classrooms.

2.4.2.3. Teachers' perception of their roles in SEL

Teachers can make significant contributions to the social and emotional development of their students as they can act as both facilitators and role models in this process (Jennings et al., 2017; Zinsser et al., 2014). They influence their students not only by what they teach but also how they interact, communicate with students and manage the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). For example, the way teachers relate to students, demonstrate empathy, manage conflicts and regulate their own emotions provides an authentic example for students. However, when Zhou & Ee, 2012 conducted a qualitative study to explore teacher perceptions of SEL in Singapore, the researchers discovered that only 33% of the teachers viewed themselves as facilitators of SEL and only 17% considered themselves role models for social emotional skills. These low percentages indicate a significant gap between teachers' perceptions of their roles and the actual expectations placed on them in promoting SECs for their students.

2.4.2.4. Teachers' perceptions of the barriers to SEL implementation

Although SEL has been proven to be beneficial in improving students' social, emotional and academic outcomes (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Durlak, et al., 2011), the effective and sustainable implementation of SEL faces several barriers. One of the most significant barriers is the *lack of awareness and understanding of SEL* among teachers, administrators and policymakers. Hoffman (2009) notes that this lack of familiarity with SEL concepts and their benefits can limit support and commitment from stakeholders. It also results in misunderstanding, indifference and even resistance to SEL. Additionally, the diverse and inconsistent terms related to SEL such as emotional intelligence, character education, 21st century skills and life skills, results in conceptual disagreement and confusion among stakeholders. This, again, leads to inconsistent or incomplete implementation of SEL (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Farrington et al., 2012).

Second, the lack of personnel trained in SEL presents an important obstacle. Specifically, the insufficient emphasis on SEL training in teacher education programs or professional development courses leads to inconsistent and ineffective application in classrooms. Without adequate training, teachers may find it hard to adapt instructional strategies to promote SECs for their students. They may feel uncertain about how to incorporate these skills into daily instruction and find it difficult to balance SEL with academic demands. Therefore, it is important to integrate SEL into teacher education programs and provide teachers with specific techniques for integrating SEL into their existing curriculum (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Burgin et al., 2021; Fleming & Bay, 2004; Huck et al., 2023).

Third, time constraints, tight schedules and pressure to prioritize academic outcomes can marginalize SEL in the classroom (Mahoney et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019). Martinez (2016) found that teachers often feel conflicted about dedicating instructional time to SEL when they are under pressure to prioritize academic content in order to meet standardized testing requirements. They are concerned that time spent on SEL content might reduce instructional time for academic learning. However, it is important to note that integrating SEL into the curriculum can have positive effects on students' academic performance as students are better equipped to fully participate in the learning process, manage their emotions and establish positive relationships with peers and teachers, which can in fact save time (Durlak, et al., 2011; OECD, 2024).

Fourth, lack of leadership support and limited involvement from family and community can impede the sustainability of SEL initiatives (Humphries et al., 2018). Administrators who understand and value the importance of SEL can provide the necessary resources, time and guidance to support teachers in integrating SEL into their instructional practices. This support can include professional development opportunities, collaboration time and a school-wide commitment to SEL. However, Ransford et al. (2009) highlight that teachers often express a need for more administrative support in implementing SEL. Similarly, limited involvement from family and community can hinder the impact of SEL outside the classroom.

Other barriers include resistance to change from teachers, administrators and other stakeholders (Domitrovich et al., 2019; Durlak et al., 2023). Those who are skeptical about the value of SEL or who are accustomed to more traditional methods may resist SEL. This resistance may result from a lack of knowledge of SEL, concerns about how it supplements academic goals or a general reluctance to change established routines. Cultural norms and educational policies can also influence SEL implementation. In contexts where academic achievement is prioritized, teachers may view SEL as irrelevant (Collie et al., 2015). Furthermore, insufficient resources such as limited funding and materials may also discourage SEL implementation (Humphries et al., 2018).

2.4.3. Teachers' practices in Social Emotional Learning

Teachers' practices in SEL refer to the concrete ways in which they demonstrate their own SECs and SEL instructional competence within the classroom. For example, teachers can model SECs for students, integrate SEL into lesson contents, daily routines and instructional practices; incorporate SEL topics into curriculum and lesson plans; organize group discussions and assess students' SECs (CASEL, 2020).

Research has consistently shown that teacher practices, whether explicit or implicit, play an important role in developing students' SEL skills, (Jones et al., 2013; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2007; Stephanie et al., 2013). Explicit SEL practices refer to teacher practices where SEL is taught intentionally, with clear definitions, sequenced skill-building, reflective practice and assessment of competences. For example, teachers can explicitly teach and model SEL skills via structured SEL lessons, role-playing tasks or explicit discussions on empathy, perspective-taking and emotional regulation (CASEL, 2020). Implicit SEL practices, on the other hand, refer to teacher practices where SEL is embedded in general classroom routines or learning tasks but without explicit instruction. Teachers can indirectly or implicitly foster cooperation through group projects, promote self-discipline through homework routines, or highlight moral values in reading texts. These practices foster SECs without explicitly referencing SEL.

Yoder (2014) conducted an extensive literature review on SEL practices and identified ten most common instructional practices which can enhance students' academic, social and emotional development. These practices include student-centered discipline, positive teacher language, responsibility and choice, warmth and support in the classroom, cooperative learning, meaningful classroom discussions, self-assessment and reflection, balanced instruction, high academic expectations and SEL competence building. Actually, these ten practices are not entirely new to teachers; they align with best educational practices, and this alignment demonstrates their relevance and applicability in contemporary classrooms. Yoder also insists that his list does not represent an exhaustive list of effective SEL strategies; therefore, teachers can flexibly employ other practices to promote SEL in the classroom. Although further research is needed to assess their impact, these practices offer specific, practical and adaptable strategies for teachers to implement SEL effectively in the classroom.

i. *Student-centered discipline* refers to the use of disciplinary strategies to nurture student agency and ownership. This practice allows students to manage or direct their behaviors and emotions and feel as though they have a voice in what occurs in the classroom (Zins et al., 2004). For instance, teachers and students can co-create class rules or regulations that are acceptable in their culture and community. This collaborative process gives students a sense of responsibility and engagement in co-constructing a positive classroom environment.

ii. Teacher language refers to how teachers talk to students. Teachers should use language which can encourage student effort, acknowledge what students have done and what they need to do to improve (Denton, 2008; Zins et al., 2004). When teachers model positive and respectful communication, students begin to learn and use similar language patterns with both teachers and peers. They become more motivated, persist in tasks and modify or continue positive behaviors based on the language teachers use in the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to think carefully about what they say to students because these words can have a significant impact on student motivation, confidence, behaviors and overall development.

iii. Responsibility and choice refer to instructional practices where teachers provide students with opportunities to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their actions (Denton, 2008; Zins et al., 2004). For example, teachers can offer students choices about topics, projects or assignments within the curriculum to provide them with a sense of ownership and autonomy over their learning. This might include allowing students to choose a book to review, select how they present a learning project (e.g., written report, powerpoint presentation, posters, video clips or plays) or decide the format of group work. These practices can help students develop a lot of SEL skills such as goal setting, self-regulation, responsible decision-making and relationship skills.

iv. Warmth and support refers to the academic, social and emotional support that students receive from their teacher and peers (Hawkins et al., 2008). Examples of warmth and support practices include creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment, promoting empathy and respect among students, encouraging open communication and creating opportunities for collaboration. More specific practices include asking students informal questions, following up with students on issues or concerns and providing opportunities for students to offer feedback and encouragement to each other. Teachers could also model desired behaviors and let students know that taking risks and asking questions are desirable in the classroom (Hattie & Clark, 2019).

v. Cooperative learning refers to specific instructional tasks where teachers have students work together to co-create learning experiences, share resources, take on complementary roles and interact effectively to achieve shared academic, social and emotional goals (Zins et al., 2004). Cooperative learning offers opportunities for students to work with peers in meaningful ways towards a common goal, improve their relationship skills such as perspective-taking, empathy and conflict resolution, communicate more effectively, negotiate the sharing of resources and tasks, seek help when needed and support each other throughout the process.

vi. Group discussions refer to conversations between teachers and students regarding teaching contents. During classroom discussions, teachers may pose more open-ended questions and encourage students to elaborate on their own opinions and those of their

peers (Zins et al., 2004). Via group discussions, students develop effective communication skills to express their own point of view, listen actively and reflect on their peers' perspectives. They can also build meaningful relationships with their peers, negotiate conflicts and boost their confidence.

vii. Self-assessment and self-reflection are closely related, but they serve distinct purposes in the learning process. Self-assessment involves students actively evaluating their own work or performance against a set of criteria or standards to identify strengths and shortcomings. Self-reflection, on the other hand, focuses on reviewing the learning process and experiences, the strategies used, emotions felt and necessary adjustments for future improvement. For example, teachers can conduct reflective activities like journaling, group discussions and creative writing to help students understand their emotions, strengths and growth areas. In short, self-assessment is about evaluating the products, but self-reflection is about understanding the process and planning for future improvements. Both of these strategies can enhance students' self-awareness, self-direction, social awareness and responsibility, and enable them to become more proactive in their learning process (Yoder, 2014).

viii. Balanced instruction refers to teachers using multiple instructional practices to keep students motivated and engaged in the learning process. For example, teachers should keep a balance between active instruction strategies (e.g. project-based learning, group discussion and inquiry-based learning) and direct instruction (where teachers provide explicit guidance or explanations of concepts). Teachers should also maintain a balance between individual and collaborative learning tasks to create opportunities for students to develop both personal qualities and teamwork skills (Yoder, 2014).

ix. Academic press refers to teachers implementing more challenging tasks for students on the basis that they have mastered easier contents (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). Teachers can set high expectations, communicate their belief in students' abilities and provide demanding yet achievable tasks to promote academic growth and self-confidence. Setting high expectations for all students can motivate them to try their best for success, build resilience, develop a growth mindset, and view challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. When they are exposed to increasingly challenging tasks, over time they can develop their self-management skills and achieve more academic success as they constantly have to regulate their emotions, stay focused and adapt their strategies to overcome difficulties.

x. SEL competence-building via modeling, practicing, feedback and coaching refers to practices that strategically and intentionally or explicitly develop SECs for students through structured activities and teacher-led guidance (Yoder, 2014). For example, before a discussion task, the teacher can teach students about active listening skills such as giving full attention to the speaker, maintaining eye contact, not interrupting and

responding to what their partner says. Then, after the discussion, the teacher can provide feedback on how well students demonstrate active listening skills and encourage improvement in aspects like body language and verbal acknowledgment.

In summary, Yoder's list of SEL practices provides a valuable resource for educators to integrate SEL into their teaching practices to enhance both academic progress and SECs for students. These practices align with established educational theories and best teaching practices; therefore, they are not only relevant for contemporary education but also adaptable to various educational contexts. Another important contribution of Yoder is that he has showcased the explicit connection between SEL and academic learning. This direct connection challenges the misconception that SEL detracts from academic goals and reconfirms that SEL is integral and parallel to the learning process. However, as admitted by Yoder, more empirical research is needed to assess the long-term impact of these strategies across different educational settings and age groups.

2.4.4. Teachers' training in Social Emotional Learning

Although studies show that teachers play an important role in the success of SEL implementation (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), there is a shortage of research on SEL within teacher education (Molyneux, 2021). This lack of emphasis could potentially affect educators' perceptions and practices in SEL (Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012). This section will examine the need for integrating SEL into teacher training programs, evaluate the presence of SEL elements and explore possible approaches to integrating SEL into teacher preparation programs. It also reviews several case studies and related research to understand current training situation.

2.4.4.1. The need for training teachers in SEL

Many teachers believe in the potential benefits of SEL; however, teachers frequently feel ill-equipped to address the social and emotional dimensions of the classroom (Burgin et al., 2021; Heineke & Vera, 2022; Molyneux, 2021; Boulton, 2014). They often claim that they lack sufficient training and support to effectively nurture students' SECs. Koller et al. (2004) also reported that both experienced and new teachers reported inadequate training in identifying and managing social emotional concerns of their students, both during their pre-service education and throughout their careers.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) conducted extensive research on SEL instruction for pre-service and early career teachers. She reported that 83% of teachers want more SEL training. Similarly, research by Jennings et al. (2017) and Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) highlights that SEL training for teachers is often insufficient in several areas. Firstly, the dosage of training may be insufficient, meaning that teachers do not receive enough instruction and practice to effectively implement SEL strategies in their classrooms. Secondly, the quality of training is low due to inadequate resources, outdated information or ineffective

teaching methods. Lastly, the emphasis on SEL training is insufficient, leading to a lack of prioritization and support from educational institutions.

To address these issues, it is necessary to prioritize and enhance SEL training for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Burgin et al., 2021; Markowitz et al., 2016). This could involve increasing the amount of dedicated training time to ensure that the training materials and resources are evidence-based and up-to-date and providing ongoing support and professional development opportunities for teachers to strengthen their SEL implementation skills. Research has shown that teachers who receive explicit training in implementing SEL will be better equipped to organize effective teaching and learning and transform the educational system, especially during these challenging times (Zinsser et al., 2014; Katz et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary for teacher preparation programs to expand their scope and provide more formal training in SEL (Brackett et al., 2012; Talvio et al., 2013; Waajid et al., 2013).

SEL training for pre-service teachers should focus on fostering their personal social emotional competencies (SECs) and SEL instructional competence. SECs include important skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). It also needs to enhance pre-service teachers' SEL instructional competence by providing them with foundational theories and practical teaching strategies to promote and assess SECs in students (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Greenberg et al., 2017). Pre-service teachers will learn to design SEL-integrated activities that develop emotional regulation, teamwork and conflict resolution skills for their students. They also acquire skills in assessing students' SECs through formative assessments and observation techniques, and then modify their teaching methods to effectively meet individual student needs (see section 2.3.3).

2.4.4.2. Approaches to integrating SEL into teacher training curriculum

The implementation of SEL within teacher education curricula varies significantly across institutions (Fleming & Bay, 2004; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Some teacher preparation programs have integrated SEL into existing coursework, fostering skills such as emotional regulation, conflict resolution and relationship-building for their pre-service teachers (Katz et al., 2020). As a result, some pre-service teachers report receiving formal instruction on SEL, while others rely primarily on informal learning experiences such as observations during field placements, workshops, on-site coaching, tutoring experience and self-teaching through reading relevant books and watching video or TV programs (Buchanan et al., 2009). Therefore, there need to be more systematic approaches to integrating SEL into preservice teacher education to ensure that future educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to support the social and emotional development of their students (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022).

Scholars have proposed several strategies to effectively incorporate SEL into teacher education. Firstly, it is important to integrate principles from developmental sciences throughout the teacher preparation curriculum. This would involve incorporating knowledge about how children develop socially and emotionally into various courses and assignments (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Secondly, pre-service teachers should be introduced to the foundational theories and empirical research on SEL. This includes understanding concepts such as emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy and relationship-building. SEL concepts should be woven into instructional materials, assignments and discussions to ensure that pre-service teachers understand how SEL aligns with various aspects of teaching and learning. Pre-service teachers should also be provided with up-to-date knowledge and strategies for fostering SEL in their classrooms.

Thirdly, pre-service teachers must enhance their own SEL skills such as emotion regulation, empathy and effective communication (Jennings et al., 2017). Through experiential learning activities, reflective exercises and peer interactions, pre-service teachers can enhance their own SECs, which enable them to model and teach SECs for their students. Fourthly, pre-service teachers benefit from opportunities to apply SEL in simulated classroom settings. Classroom-based video examples and role-playing exercises allow them to practice implementing SEL strategies such as conflict resolution, emotion support and positive behavior reinforcement. Feedback from peers and instructors helps refine their skills and build confidence in applying SEL in real-world teaching contexts (Stephanie et al., (2013)).

Fifthly, hands-on experience is important for pre-service teachers to effectively integrate SEL into their teaching practice. Supervised student micro-teaching and practicum offer opportunities for them to observe experienced educators modeling SEL and to implement SEL strategies themselves under the guidance of mentor teachers. Mentors then can offer personalized support and feedback to help pre-service teachers refine their SEL knowledge and skills. Finally, it is necessary to redesign policies for teacher certification to require educators to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in addressing the social and emotional aspects of teaching (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). This would ensure that SEL becomes a core component of teacher certification requirements.

2.4.4.3. Examinations of SEL elements in teacher preparation programs

Researchers have raised concerns about the adequacy of teacher education programs in addressing SEL for pre-service teachers. Their investigations focus on identifying gaps in current teacher training and propose methods to more effectively incorporate SEL skills into these programs. Examinations of educational curricula reveal a lack of emphasis and dosage on providing teachers with the prerequisite knowledge and skills to implement SEL in their teaching practices.

State et al. (2011) conducted an analysis of the course content in mandatory educational courses within elementary teacher preparation programs in the United States. The study found that out of the 80 reviewed syllabi, 42 of them (53%) contained no content related to students' social, emotional and behavioral problems. Furthermore, even in the courses that did touch on these topics, the coverage was notably limited. When examining the specific subjects covered in these courses, only eight out of 38 syllabi (21%) addressed classroom management, six (16%) included information regarding the characteristics and identification of emotional and behavioral disorders and merely two (5%) included content on children's social and emotional development.

Vinnes et al. (2014) assessed the coverage of content related to social and emotional development and behavior management in course syllabi of 78 university graduate teacher education programs. The researchers found that there was a significant variation across different graduate teacher education programs. Although some programs covered all four topics, others only briefly mentioned or completely omitted certain areas. This gap suggests that there is no consistent approach to addressing social, emotional and behavioural issues in teacher education programs. The study, therefore, highlights the need for standardized guidelines or requirements for the inclusion of these contents in graduate teacher education programs.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) conducted a content analysis of required courses in teacher preparation programs in the US and found that training opportunities for SEL were overall limited. Specifically, their results reveal that only a small percentage of teacher preparation programs in the US offered courses that included specific facets of SEL. These percentages were 13% for relationship skills, 7% for responsible decision-making, 6% for self-management, 2% for social awareness and approximately 1% for self-awareness. These findings highlight the limited inclusion of SEL content in teacher preparation programs, especially in the areas of self-awareness and social awareness.

Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) reported that only a few states had standards in all the five core SECs. Self-awareness and self-management were the least addressed; the most frequently addressed were responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills. The study also found that 63% of courses had no SEL content, and that courses such as Curriculum Development, Instruction and Methods, Psychology, and Special Education were more likely to include SEL content. These findings indicate that despite the increasing demand for SEL, universities in the US are falling behind in providing coursework to develop SECs for pre-service teachers. The report also highlighted that many teacher preparation programs lack established curricula, guidelines or best practices for instructors to teach SEL to pre-service teachers.

2.4.4.4. Case studies of SEL-focused teacher education programs

Several teacher education programs have begun to incorporate SEL into their coursework. The following case studies of SEL-integrated teacher education programs offer valuable examples of effective SEL integration strategies.

San Jose State University's Collaborative for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child (CRTWC) stands out as a pioneer in integrating SEL into teacher education programs. The CRTWC aims to incorporate SEL into all aspects of their K-8 teacher education program to ensure that teacher candidates receive explicit instruction on how to incorporate SEL into various aspects of their teaching practices. Their initiatives include SEL-focused professional development for faculty, university supervisors and cooperating classroom teachers, along with the development of SEL-centered resources such as videos, case studies, lesson plan and classroom observation templates. Preliminary qualitative findings reveal that these efforts are influencing faculty, supervisors and pre-service teachers to integrate SEL into their teaching practices. This pioneering work informs the field about best practices in SEL training to nurture both academic and social emotional growth in future educators and the students they will serve (Markowitz et al., 2016).

In 2009, the University of British Columbia (UBC) introduced SEL into its elementary teacher education curriculum. The SEL training cohort at UBC incorporates SEL throughout both the courses and practicum experiences. This means that teacher candidates in the cohort receive explicit instruction on SEL research, theory and evidence-based practices in their coursework. The Faculty of Education supports this initiative by maintaining an "SEL Program" library with many SEL programs for teacher candidates to review and integrate into coursework and student teaching. Teacher candidates also have opportunities to implement SEL strategies during their practicum to gain hands-on experience in supporting students' SECs.

The SEL in Teacher Education (SEL-TED) project, conducted by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015), focused on examining the integration of SEL into state-level teacher certification requirements and coursework in U.S. Teacher preparation programs. The SEL-TED project explored the implementation of SEL programs to foster teachers' SECs and their ability to support students' SECs. Future teachers have the opportunity to learn about evidence-based practices and strategies for promoting SECs in their students. The findings and recommendations from the SEL-TED project can inform policy and practice in teacher education to promote the inclusion of SEL dimensions in teacher certification requirements and coursework.

Other prominent programs designed to promote teachers' SECs are CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) and SMART-in-Education (Stress Management and Resiliency Training). These programs aim to reduce stress and burnout, enhance teachers' job satisfaction, empathy for students, emotional regulation skills and overall well-being. Initial studies indicate their effectiveness in promoting teachers' SECs and well-being (Jennings et al., 2017). For example, teachers who underwent CARE training exhibited improvements in emotion regulation, mindfulness and psychological distress reduction. Notably, classrooms with CARE-trained teachers maintained consistent levels of emotional support throughout the school year. These findings highlight the long-term benefits of the above interventions in fostering a supportive learning environment.

2.5. Implementation of Social Emotional Learning in the World and in Vietnam

There is a growing interest in integrating SEL principles into educational practices to address the social and emotional needs of students. This section examines the current state of SEL implementation around the world and then focuses on the Vietnamese educational context. This background influences how pre-service EFL teachers perceive and practise SEL within their training program.

2.5.1. Implementation of Social Emotional Learning around the world

SEL has gained attention and recognition in a lot of countries around the world. The United States is considered a leader in SEL implementation. CASEL has been established and played a decisive role in providing frameworks and resources for the educators of the country. Various well-established SEL programs such as PATHS, Second Step and RULER have been implemented. Several states such as California and Illinois have developed guidelines and standards to support SEL implementation in their schools. At the national level, programs like the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development are advancing research and practices in SEL.

In the United Kingdom, SEL implementation is not compulsory in the national curriculum, but many schools recognize its importance and integrate it into their teaching practices. Some schools implement explicit SEL programs. For example, PATHS focuses on emotional literacy and social skills; SEAL integrates SEL principles into various school activities; MindUP combines mindfulness with SEL; Emotion Works emphasizes understanding and managing emotions; and the Thrive Approach offers targeted interventions for social and emotional development. These examples highlight the diversity of SEL initiatives in the UK.

Finland emphasizes students' holistic well-being alongside academic achievement. SEL is integrated within the Finnish national curriculum throughout primary and secondary education. The KiVa Antibullying Program, for example, focuses on prevention and

intervention strategies; School-Wide Positive Behavior Support aims to foster positive behavior; and Peer mediation programs aims to help students resolve conflicts peacefully. Although implementation may vary, Finland maintains a consistent commitment to prioritizing students' social and emotional growth as integral to their education.

In Canada, SEL is integrated into provincial education systems to promote mental health and well-being. Programs like Roots of Empathy and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction are implemented to enhance students' self-regulation and empathy. Other SEL skills like empathy, cooperation and respect are also supported by various programs like Social and Emotional Training and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies. New Zealand views SEL as essential for holistic education, aligning with the country's competency-based education.

In Portugal, the Education Act of 1986 recognized the importance of non-cognitive aspects of education, emphasizing the need for the harmonious development of students beyond cognitive dimensions. Successful SEL programs include Personal and Social Development and Mental Health Promotion. In Spain, awareness of social and emotional aspects of education emerged in the 1980s, with many initiatives promoting social and emotional education. France introduced fundamental competencies in 2006 to equip students with skills for empathy, citizenship, problem-solving and lifelong learning.

In Australia, SEL is integrated into the educational system through various strategies. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians emphasizes the importance of social and emotional skills in preparing students for fulfilling lives and contributing to society. Popular SEL programs include Second Step; KidsMatter; Berry Street Education Model, The Resilience Project and MindUP. In Singapore, SEL is integral to holistic development, with initiatives like SEL for Success and Character and Citizenship Education promoting skills such as resilience and responsible decision-making. Both countries prioritize teacher training to effectively deliver SEL and nurture students' SECs alongside academic excellence.

It can be seen that many countries are recognizing the role of schools in addressing the social and emotional development of students. Although there are variations in terminology and approaches, the main goal of these initiatives are the same – to foster students' social-emotional growth and to facilitate learning. It is also important to note that much of the research on SEL has been conducted in the USA and Europe, meanwhile, there is less research on SEL in other parts of the world like Africa or Asia. This gap may limit our understanding of how different contexts perceive and practice SEL. In addition, these SEL programs are free-standing, which means they are implemented separately rather than being integrated into the teaching and learning process.

2.5.2. Social Emotional Learning in Vietnamese general education

In Vietnam, SEL is still a relatively new and emerging field with limited research and attention (Huynh et al., 2021). The education system has traditionally focused on academic achievement and there is now a transition towards recognizing the value in promoting student well-being, mental health and overall success in life. Educational policies in Vietnam do emphasize the importance of integrating life skills, soft skills and other non-academic skills into education. This section provides a review of the studies related to SEL that have been conducted in Vietnam to partly portrait the current state of SEL implementation in Vietnam and highlight the challenges and opportunities for integrating SEL into the education system.

In recent years, SEL has been increasingly integrated into educational programs in Vietnam, especially in private educational institutions in early childhood and primary education (Huynh et al., 2021). According to Huynh et al. (2018), approximately 80% of private education centers and private schools in Ho Chi Minh City have initiated SEL programming since 2017. SEL programs have been imported from countries with advanced education such as the USA, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Canada. This indicates a growing recognition of the importance of SEL in these institutions and their commitment to fostering the social and emotional development of their students.

By contrast, the implementation of SEL in state schools is still limited as SEL is often regarded as an optional or extracurricular activity (Huynh et al., 2021). It is commonly believed that fostering SECs is the responsibility of "life skill" experts rather than teachers of general subjects such as Maths, Literature and English (Huynh et al., 2021). When SEL is seen as an optional or extracurricular activity, there is a risk that it may not receive the necessary attention and resources to be effectively integrated into students' learning experiences. This can hinder the development of social and emotional skills among students, which are important for their overall well-being and success.

In Vietnam, there are several SEL-related programs being implemented to promote the social and emotional well-being of students. These efforts include UNESCO's "Peaceful Schools" Initiative, "Happy School", life skills education, "Positive School" Program, SEL-Viet project and other NGO-led initiatives. Schools also offer counseling and guidance services to support students' mental health and interpersonal skills. These diverse programs highlight the increasing recognition of the importance of nurturing students' social and emotional skills alongside their academic development.

At preschool level, Nguyen (2021) investigated the perceptions of SEL among 25 preschool administrators working in various cities in Vietnam. The results indicated that these administrators expressed a desire to coordinate with higher management levels to develop SEL programs for preschool children synchronously. This indicates their commitment to creating a supportive environment for preschool teachers to develop their

own SECs and, in turn, effectively promote SEL among the preschool students. The findings highlight the importance of collaboration and support from higher management levels in implementing SEL programs in preschool settings.

At primary school level, Tran and Trinh (2017) investigated the development of SECs for grade 3 students and the role of teachers in fostering SECs in teaching the subject of Vietnamese in two primary schools in Thua Thien Hue province. Based on the research findings, the researchers recommend developing SECs for students as early as possible, believing that SECs are foundational for children's overall well-being and academic success. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of integrating SEL into existing school subjects like Vietnamese as these subjects often involve communication, collaboration and self-expression.

Huynh et al. (2018) utilized a survey questionnaire to assess the self-awareness and self-management competencies of 1004 students in grades 4 and 5 from Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho City. Based on the mean scores, the students' self-awareness and self-management competencies were assessed as above average. The study also found statistical differences in self-awareness and self-management competencies based on gender and residential areas. Furthermore, the research reveals a positive correlation at a moderate level between self-awareness and self-management competencies.

Concerning teachers' perceptions of SEL, Huynh et al. (2018) investigated the perception of SEL among 250 Vietnamese primary school teachers, using a scale called the Teachers' Perceptions of SEL scale. The research results show that regardless of differences in educational backgrounds and years of experience, all teachers were aware of the necessity and challenges associated with implementing SEL in primary school classrooms. However, there were significant differences in the perception of barriers to SEL implementation among teachers with different years of teaching experience. Various educational backgrounds had a considerable impact on teachers' perceptions of the necessity of SEL and the barriers to its implementation. The study also found a positive correlation between teachers' perceptions of the necessity of SEL and the barriers to its implementation.

At middle school level, Hoang and Vu (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with middle school students and teachers participating in the Ephrata Summer Program in Ho Chi Minh City to explore the aspects of emotion and empathy. The results indicate that both students and teachers recognize the importance and benefits of teaching SEL in school settings. However, the students' self-assessment of their empathy skills was relatively low. The study emphasizes the need for implementing SEL in school curricula to provide more opportunities for students to develop social emotional skills.

The research conducted by Tran et al. (2019) focuses on investigating the current status of SECs among 1250 students in grades 8 and 9 from eight junior secondary schools in

four provinces: Ninh Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue and Tien Giang. To assess SECs, the researchers adapted and used the SECs Questionnaire developed by Zhou and Ee (2012). The results indicate that SECs of adolescents are above average. However, the SECs levels were found to be uneven across the five domains measured by the questionnaire. These findings can be valuable for the development of SEL programs specifically targeted at adolescents.

Huynh et al. (2021) studied the implementation of the SEL model in secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City through surveys and interviews with teachers. The results reveal that 21.44% of the surveyed teachers frequently implemented SEL, nearly half applied it to some extent, and 19.28% rarely. Teachers generally recognize the benefits of SEL but face several challenges such as time constraints, academic pressure, insufficient knowledge and skills, a rigid curriculum, administrative constraints, difficulties in selecting SEL activities and inadequate infrastructure. The most favored approach to applying SEL is integrating it into various subjects. Overall, the study suggests that the current application of SEL is average and highlights the need for increased opportunities for teachers to learn and implement SEL effectively.

At high school level, Huynh et al. (2019) study the correlation of the five core SECs among secondary school students in Ho Chi Minh City. Two questionnaires were utilized in the study: the first questionnaire focused on the five SECs; the second included open-ended items and problem-solving exercises to assess the students' competencies in solving written problems related to each of the five SECs. The results of the study indicate that SECs of Vietnamese secondary school students are at an average level. The study results also reveal strong and positive correlations between the five SECs. Based on these results, the researchers proposed the development of an education program specifically designed to train and improve all the five SECs for secondary school students in Vietnam.

Giang et al. (2023) explored the SECs of Vietnamese high school students. The study utilized a qualitative case study and involved interviews with 74 students, 12 teachers, 7 school administrators and 4 school counselors. The researchers found that Vietnamese high school students displayed confidence, respect, balance and satisfaction but showed weaknesses in individual perspectives, active listening, empathy, authentic emotional awareness and emotional management. These findings provide valuable information for educators, researchers and administrators to design school-based SEL programs that promote all of the five core SECs and their related specific skills for students.

At higher education level, Nguyen (2021) assessed emotional intelligence (EI) among students at Hue University, using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF). The results reveal that students exhibited relatively high levels of EI, especially in self-control of emotions and building relationships with others.

However, they demonstrated comparatively lower abilities in maintaining relationships and appropriately responding to others' emotions. Notably, students at the university of education outperformed those at other universities, which could be attributed to specific aspects of EI integrated into their educational curriculum. Interestingly, male students exhibited greater self-control compared to females; no significant differences were observed between students from rural and urban areas.

With regard to SECs assessment, Dinh et al. (2021) adapted and validated the SECs Questionnaire designed by Zhou and Ee (2012) to collect data from 1.250 adolescents in four provinces in Vietnam. Confirmatory factor analysis was then used to determine the fit of the questionnaire to the Vietnamese adolescent population. The analysis results reveal that both a five-factor model and a hierarchical model fit the data quite well. As the need for SEL implementation increases, the availability of a validated SECs assessment instrument which is specifically designed for Vietnamese adolescents will promote the effective implementation and evaluation of SEL initiatives in the Vietnamese context.

Regarding the challenges of integrating SEL into education, Huynh et al. (2021) utilized in-depth interviews with students and core teachers to examine and explain the lack of successful SEL integration at the secondary level. The findings reveal several major challenges: the existing curriculum did not align well with the principles of SEL; teachers lacked the necessary training and support to effectively integrate SEL into their teaching methods; teachers did not know how to incorporate SEL into their daily teaching practices; there was limited emphasis on understanding students' psychological needs and individual differences. These challenges could impede the development of SECs for students. These challenges highlight the need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, revise the curriculum to incorporate SEL principles, and promote a whole-school approach that values and nurtures SECs.

In the field of English language teaching, Le (2020) studied the integration of SEL materials into English lessons. In the first phase, the research identified the sources of stress experienced by the students and their common responses. The second phase investigated the effects of integrating SEL into English lessons to address stressful situations. The SEL-integrated classroom activities included self-reading, writing reflection and listening to group presentations on SEL-related topics. The results reveal that the students regularly and seriously experienced stress. Despite the significant impact of stress on students' emotions, health and academic performance, it was not being addressed in a positive manner. The most common response to stress was avoidance, which was attributed to a lack of soft skills. The researcher then argued that SECs would help students effectively deal with their problems and negative emotions.

Tran and Le (2023) explored the relationship between EFL learning and SEL in the context of Vietnam's educational reform. The researchers conducted curriculum analysis, textbook review and classroom observations, and found out that although language learning and SEL are mutually reinforcing, SEL remained absent from EFL teaching and teacher education. They identified major barriers to SEL integration, including the low English proficiency and outdated pedagogical skills of current EFL teachers, as well as the lack of formal SEL content in teacher training programs. They also highlighted that although SEL-related contents occasionally appear implicitly in textbook topics, they are not explicitly named or systematically developed through instruction. The researchers concluded with a recommendation for the development of context-specific SEL frameworks, improved teacher training and clearer policy guidance to ensure effective SEL implementation.

2.5.3. Social Emotional Learning in EFL teaching and learning

Although there are lots of studies that explore the connection between SEL and academic achievements, there is limited research on integrating SEL into EFL teaching. Language acquisition is a complex process affected by various factors beyond just grammar and vocabulary (Dresser, 2013). Among these factors, social and emotional aspects are increasingly recognized for their impact on language acquisition and instruction (Dewaele et al., 2022; Mercer, 2021; Pentón Herrera, 2020). Therefore, SEL offers a promising approach to EFL teaching and learning (Adams & Richie, 2017).

2.5.3.1. Social dimensions of language teaching and learning

Social dimensions are fundamental to language acquisition as they provide learners with authentic opportunities to mobilize, activate, practice and reinforce their language skills. Several theoretical frameworks elaborate on the social dimensions of language teaching and learning. For example, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that learning occurs via social interaction and collaboration. Similarly, Bandura's (1977) Social learning theory emphasizes the impact of social interactions and observational learning on skill development.

Research supports these theories and has demonstrated that social interactions facilitate the development of both linguistic and pragmatic competencies (Gholami, 2012; Montero et al., 2014). For instance, pair work, group discussions and other collaborative tasks can promote the use of complex language structures and the negotiation of meaning. Moreover, these interactions help learners develop pragmatic skills such as turn-taking, politeness strategies and context-appropriate language use (Dresser, 2013; Kasper & Rose, 2001, Gholami, 2012). Volet et al. (2009) claim that social management skills such as seeking assistance and engaging in collaborative activities, positively impact language learning as they enhance meaningful interactions and nurture a supportive community.

More recent research by Bai et al. (2019) and Cho et al. (2019) highlights the benefits of social interactions, which can help foster empathy, respect differences, establish support networks and enhance language acquisition. Pentón Herrera (2020) also agree on the important role of emotions, interpersonal relations and social and cultural factors in language learning experiences and outcomes. Interactions with peers, teachers, family and the broader community create authentic communication opportunities, support and a sense of belonging, enhancing linguistic and intercultural communicative competence. All of these skills are related to SEL.

2.5.3.2. Emotional dimensions of language teaching and learning

The emotional dimensions also play a very important role in language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Historically, language education primarily focused on linguistic knowledge and proficiency, often overlooking the role of affective factors. However, Yu (2022) argues that affective factors such as motivation, attitude and anxiety, can significantly influence learners' engagement and success in acquiring a new language. Several theoretical frameworks elaborate on the emotional dimensions of language teaching and learning. One of the most prominent is the Affective Filter Hypothesis, proposed by Krashen (1982). This hypothesis suggests that affective variables or emotional states such as anxiety and low self-esteem act as filters that can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition.

Positive emotions such as enjoyment and interest can enhance motivation and facilitate the learning process (Dewaele et al., 2022; Pentón Herrera, 2020). Conversely, negative emotions like anxiety and stress can hinder language acquisition by affecting learners' willingness to participate and their ability to process information effectively (Horwitz et al., 1986). Subsequent research confirms these findings and emphasizes the need for strategies to reduce negative emotions in language learners. Similarly, several researchers emphasize the importance of fostering emotion regulation skills for students to help them manage their emotions, enhance cognitive processes, create a positive learning environment and achieve academic success (MacIntyre et al, 2019).

Based on the above discussed theories and research, it can be seen that SEL can be a promising approach to language education as SEL takes into consideration the social and emotional dimensions of language learning. SEL involves the development of competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making, which can enhance students' motivation, reduce anxiety and improve positive classroom atmosphere, all contributing to language acquisition (Zinsser et al., 2014).

2.5.3.3. Integrating SEL into language learning

The English language subject can be considered suitable for fostering SECs in students because of its alignment with the teaching content and teaching methods that can support the development of these skills (Dresser, 2013; Melani et al., 2020). SEL promotes interpersonal skills and peer collaboration through activities like group discussions and role-plays, which are very important for effective communication (Zins et al., 2004). SEL also enhances the learning environment as it can foster empathy, respect and communication (Zinsser et al., 2014). Moreover, SEL can reduce language anxiety by creating a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and learning from mistakes (Krashen, 1982; Teng & Zhang, 2018).

Although the direct impact of SEL on EFL instruction hasn't been extensively researched, several studies demonstrate the positive effects of integrating SEL practices into language learning. Pentón Herrera is one of the most prominent researchers in this field. His research works demonstrate how SEL strategies can impact students' social emotional growth and academic success (Pentón Herrera, 2020, 2021, 2024). He emphasizes the importance of SEL practices such as restorative circles, self-reflective writing (like poetry and letters to self) and the thoughtful decoration of learning spaces to create a sense of belonging and safety for students. These practices help students manage emotions more effectively, foster better interpersonal relationships and enhance their ability to cope with the challenges of adapting to a new language and culture.

Similarly, Malloy (2019) found that SEL support in the classroom led to faster language proficiency improvements among language learners. Martin (2020) also found that social and emotional skills predicted improvements in English vocabulary outcomes. In Indonesia, Suganda et al. (2018) developed the Creative SEL English classroom model and found positive effects on students' SECs, academic motivation and classroom climate. In Iran, research by Soodmand Afshar et al. (2016) among Iranian EFL adult learners showed that those with higher emotional intelligence achieved better in learning English, especially in speaking skills.

The above studies emphasize the importance of addressing students' social and emotional well-being alongside their cognitive development in EFL classrooms, and at the same time they suggest that SEL integration can contribute to students' holistic growth and academic success in English language learning. Inspired by these findings, the current study aims to investigate how pre-service EFL teachers perceive and implement SEL within the English classroom.

2.5.4. Social Emotional Learning in teacher education in Vietnam

Although the concepts of SEL may be relatively new in the Vietnamese educational system and teacher training (Huynh et al., 2021), it does not mean that SEL is completely ignored. Research indicates that SEL principles are increasingly integrated into pre-service teacher education, even if not explicitly labeled as such (Do and Zsolnai, 2022). Pre-service teachers in Vietnam are being equipped with cognitive and non-cognitive skills necessary to address social and emotional issues in the classroom. However, the absence of competence criteria directly and explicitly related to SECs for teachers poses challenges in promoting SEL integration (Do and Zsolnai, 2022).

Do and Zsolnai (2022) claim that Vietnamese teacher education programs are beginning to incorporate aspects of SEL such as emotional intelligence and stress management, into their curricula. For instance, courses on educational psychology and classroom management include components that indirectly support SEL by focusing on building positive student-teacher relationships and managing classroom behaviors. These courses prepare pre-service teachers to handle various social and emotional challenges in the classroom. In addition, the integration of modules on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution helps pre-service teachers develop the skills needed to create a positive and supportive classroom environment.

Based on the four approaches to SEL proposed by Dusenbury et al. (2015), Do & Zsolnai (2022) proposed four strategies to embed SEL into teacher education programs in the Vietnamese context. First, they suggest implementing free-standing SEL lessons to explicitly enhance pre-service teachers' SEL and ensure SEL is a formal part of the curriculum with dedicated planning and assessment. Second, SEL should be integrated into existing courses such as General Psychology and Pedagogical Practices, which allows pre-service teachers to apply SEL and understand its relevance in their teaching practices. The third approach involves integrating SEL into daily teaching practices like project-based learning or collaborative learning. Lastly, using the organizational setting to support SEL as a school-wide initiative is recommended (Do & Zsolnai, 2022).

Phan (2021) investigated the actual situation of developing SECs for preschool teachers. She administered a survey among 150 preschool teachers to assess their understanding and application of SEL in their teaching practices. The results reveal that the majority of teachers lacked a comprehensive understanding of SEL and had not prioritized the development of SECs for preschool children. Additionally, the survey indicated that teachers lacked knowledge on effectively applying SEL to preschool children. Based on the survey findings, Phan proposed specific contents for SEL training for preschool teachers, including raising teachers' awareness of SEL, fostering SECs for preschool teachers themselves, enhancing their competence in organizing SEL activities and improving their ability to assess the effectiveness of SEL activities.

In addition, Huynh et al. (2022) investigated the perceptions of Vietnamese pre-service teachers about the competence to implement SEL into teaching. The study utilized a questionnaire and involved a sample of 1,100 pre-service teachers majoring in Primary Education from six universities across Vietnam. The results indicated that the pre-service teachers had an average perception of the competence to implement SEL into teaching. Specifically, the researchers found that the students faced difficulties in recognizing, distinguishing and applying the concept of SEL, SEL applying competence and its components. The research identified the current gaps and challenges faced by pre-service teachers in integrating SEL into their teaching practices.

In summary, the literature on SEL in Vietnam has witnessed significant growth over the past decade, indicating a rising awareness of its importance among researchers and educators. Studies have explored various aspects of SEL, including its perception among educators, implementation in schools, impact on students' SECs and integration into teacher education. Findings from these studies have demonstrated the value of SEL in promoting students' social, emotional and academic success. However, challenges persist in the effective implementation of SEL in Vietnamese schools. These include inadequate understanding among teachers, inconsistencies in SEL practices across educational levels, insufficient training, inflexible curriculum and time constraints. Moving forward, it is important for researchers to address these challenges to further promote SEL in Vietnamese education.

2.6. Research Gaps and the Need for the Current Study

The literature review has reviewed and evaluated major findings, methodologies, theoretical frameworks and limitations of prior research. It can be seen that although there have been significant advancements in SEL research, there are still several notable gaps that require further studies.

2.6.1. Lack of research on the application of SEL in EFL learning and teaching

Although SEL has been extensively studied in general education settings, especially in preschool and elementary schools (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017), limited research exists on its application in specific subject content instruction like Literature or History. Similarly, there is a lack of research on SEL implementation in the EFL classroom to investigate the specific contexts and needs of EFL teachers and learners. Several pioneer researchers in this field include Pentón Herrera (2020, 2021, 2024), Malloy (2019), Martin (2020), Suganda et al. (2018) and Soodmand Afshar et al. (2016). There is a need to pay more attention to SEL in the field of English language teaching to create more opportunities for enhancing language learning through SEL strategies.

2.6.2. Insufficient exploration of teachers' practices of SEL

Although many existing studies have explored teachers' perceptions of SEL (Brackett et al..2012; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Buchanan et al., 2009; Zhou & Ee, 2012; Schultz et al., 2010), there is a scarcity of studies that investigate teachers' practices of SEL or how they perceive and integrate SEL in their teaching. Additionally, existing literature emphasizes the importance of aligning teachers' perceptions with practices (Elias et al., 2003; Borg, 2003); however, there is a scarcity of studies that investigate this alignment. This gap indicates the need for research to investigate the alignment between pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL to enhance teacher preparation programs and promote effective SEL integration in EFL instruction (Fleming & Bay, 2004).

2.6.3. Limited focus on social emotional components of teacher training

Although there is a growing body of literature on the social-emotional aspects of learning and teaching, there are only a few studies examining the social and emotional components of teacher education (e.g. Buchanan et al., 2009; Burgin et al., 2021; Jennings et al., 2017; Markowitz et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Waajid, et al, 2013). Fewer studies have examined teachers' SEL, particularly pre-service teachers. Where teachers are included, the focus is on their personal SECs rather than SEL instructional competence (Huynh et al., 2022; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Phan, 2021). This gap requires further research to address the need of pre-service teachers to develop their own SECs and SEL instructional competence to effectively integrate SEL into their teaching practices.

2.6.4. Quantitative dominance in SEL research

A review of the literature indicates a significant amount of quantitative research on SEL (e.g. Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2009; Schultz et al., 2010). Few studies utilized qualitative methods such as interviews (e.g., Zhou & Ee, 2012) and focus groups (e.g., Humphries et al., 2018). However, relying solely on one method can result in a limited understanding of the research topic. Qualitative methods may lack generalizability while quantitative methods may overlook the contextual factors and subjective experiences of participants. A mixed-methods design is therefore, needed to overcome these limitations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of SEL in teacher education, and Zinsser et al. (2014) stand out as an exception in the literature for their use of a mixed-methods design in studying SEL.

2.6.5. Limited research on SEL in Asian and Vietnamese contexts

Most existing studies have been conducted in Western cultures, which leaves gaps in understanding SEL in Asian cultural and educational contexts. In Vietnam, a significant gap exists in the research and practical integration of SEL principles within the educational system, especially in public schools (Huynh et al., 2021; Tran & Le, 2023).

The limited research in this area suggests a need for comprehensive studies that explore the unique challenges and opportunities of integrating SEL into the Vietnamese education system. Such research should investigate cultural, social and institutional factors that may act as barriers or facilitators to SEL implementation.

In summary, the literature reveals that although SEL has been studied extensively in general education contexts, research on its application in ELT remains limited. Second, although many studies have explored teachers' perceptions of SEL, there is insufficient research on their actual practices and the alignment between these perceptions and practices. Third, there is limited research on how teacher education programs prepare educators to integrate SEL into their teaching. Moreover, there is a scarcity of research on SEL in Asian and Vietnamese educational contexts, which may differ significantly from Western settings in terms of cultural and educational values. In other words, it remains underinvestigated how EFL pre-service teachers in Vietnam perceive SEL, how they experience it during their training, and how they practice it in EFL contexts.

2.6.6. The need for the current study

This study responds directly to these gaps by investigating three interrelated dimensions of SEL in the EFL teacher education program of one pedagogical university in Vietnam: (1) pre-service teachers' perceptions of SEL; (2) their actual classroom practices in SEL; and (3) the role of the training program in shaping these perceptions and practices. To achieve these objectives, this study utilized a mixed-methods design, which supports previous research by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Figure 3 summarizes the identified gaps in existing literature and the efforts to address these gaps by clearly stating the research aim, research questions and research design.

Figure 3
Research Gaps and the Current Study
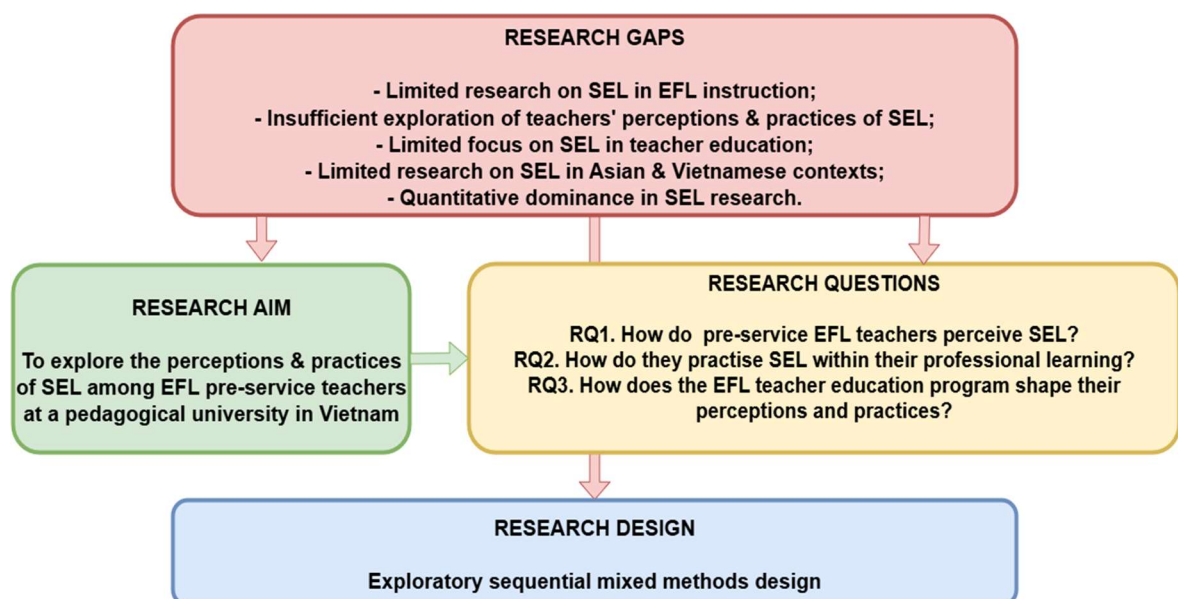
2.7. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks of the Current Study

This section outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the current study. CASEL's 2020 Framework offers a comprehensive wide range of competencies. Jennings and Greenberg's Model emphasizes the role of teachers' SECs in the classroom. Lawlor's Framework focuses on integrating SEL into teacher education programs to prepare teachers for SEL. Based on these theoretical foundations, the study built the conceptual framework that positions pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL within the specific Vietnamese educational and cultural context.

2.7.1. CASEL's Framework for Systemic Social Emotional Learning

CASEL provides one of the most widely recognized and influential frameworks of social emotional skills. This framework was first introduced in the 1990s, refined over time and structured into concentric circles, each representing different levels of influence and implementation of SEL. At the center of this framework is "Social and Emotional Learning," which encompasses five interrelated core SECs, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and responsible decision-making. Each competence is then broken down into a set of specific social-emotional skills (see Figure 1 & Figure 4).

Surrounding the five core SECs is the *classroom* environment, which highlights the importance of SEL instruction and classroom climate for students to develop their social and emotional skills. The next layer – *schools* - stresses the need for a whole-school approach to ensure that all aspects of the school contribute to students' social-emotional development. Beyond the school, the framework extends to *families and caregivers*, highlighting the need for authentic partnerships between schools and families to support students' continuous development of SECs

Figure 4

CASEL's 2020 Framework for Systemic SEL

(Catalano et al., 2003). The outermost circle represents the broader *communities*, which provide additional support and resources for SEL (Durlak et al., 2011).

The current study chose the CASEL Framework as the main theoretical framework because it is well-established, evidence-based, comprehensive and practical in the field. It provides specific, observable behaviors and outlines reasonable short- and long-term outcomes for both children and adults. In addition, it offers transparent terminology and specific operational definitions for each competence and their sub-skills, facilitating

better understanding and implementation. Moreover, the framework is empirically supported by research findings which have validated its effectiveness in improving academic performance, emotional well-being and prosocial behaviors for students (Durlak et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2016; Sklad et al., 2012).

2.7.2. Jennings and Greenberg's Prosocial Classroom Model

Jennings and Greenberg's 2009 model of the prosocial classroom uses the five core SECs developed by CASEL; however, as can be seen in Figure 5, the model puts more emphasis on the impact of teachers' SECs on students' social, emotional and academic outcomes. At the core of the model are the "teachers' social & emotional skills & well being", regarded as the starting point for a positive classroom dynamic. This domain influences three subsequent processes: "healthy teacher/student relationships," "effective classroom management skills" and "effective SEL implementation". These processes, in turn, collectively contribute to a "healthy classroom climate", which then leads to positive "student social, emotional & academic outcomes". The model also acknowledges the influence of "School/Community Context Factors" such as school policies, community support and other social and cultural influences.

Figure 5

Jennings and Greenberg's 2009 Prosocial Classroom Model
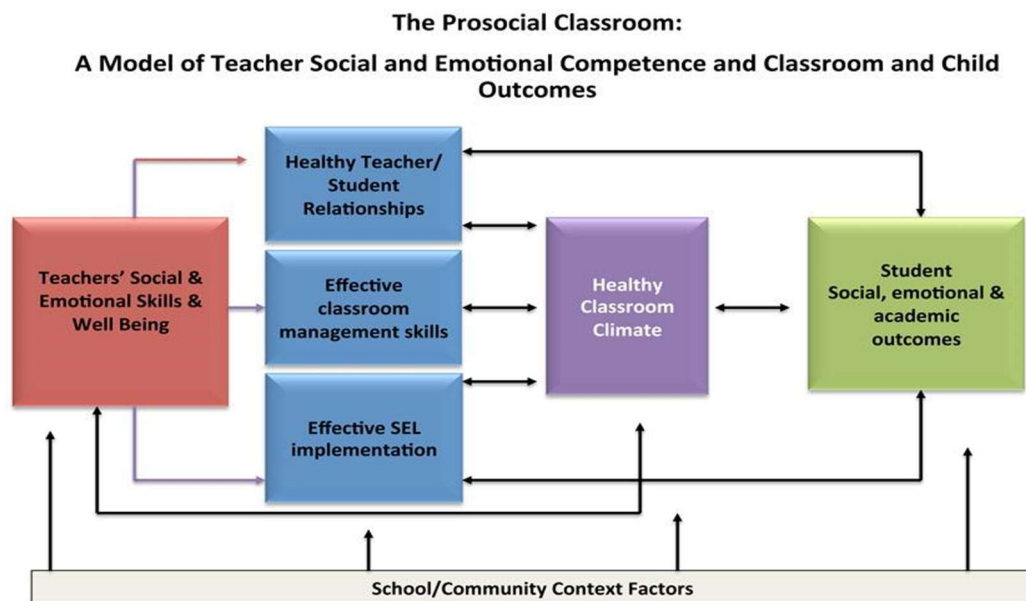
The Prosocial Classroom Model emphasizes the significance of teachers' SECs in improving student outcomes. The model suggests that when teachers possess strong SECs, it sets off a chain reaction that improves the entire classroom environment, including teacher-student relationships, classroom management, SEL implementation and classroom climate, all of which leads to improved social, emotional and academic outcomes among students. Although this model has several similarities with the

CASEL's 2020 Framework for Systemic SEL, it focuses more on the classroom-level influences of SEL and on the impact of teachers' own SECs and well-being. These principles are in line with the context of the current study; therefore, the Prosocial Classroom Model is adopted as one of the theoretical frameworks for the study.

2.7.3. Lawlor's Framework for Promoting the Prosocial Classroom in Educator Preparation

Lawlor (2016) proposed a framework for promoting the prosocial classroom model in teacher preparation, building on the foundational work of Jennings and Greenberg (2009). It demonstrates a cyclical process where teacher preparation enhances teacher SECs, which in turn fosters a healthy classroom climate essential for enhancing student academic, social and emotional outcomes. The first component of the framework, teacher preparation, focuses on equipping teachers with essential content knowledge, pedagogical skills and targeted mindfulness and SEL practices. This preparation serves as the foundation for teachers to develop SECs necessary to create a healthy classroom classmate. The second component highlights the importance of teachers' own SECs for building healthy student-teacher relationships, managing classrooms effectively and implementing SEL strategies proficiently. The third component, healthy classroom climate, is the outcome of effective teacher preparation and the development of teacher SECs. A healthy classroom climate is characterized by positive interactions, emotional safety and academic support. This positive atmosphere not only enhances student learning but also contributes to their SECs.

This framework is relevant for the current study as it puts an emphasis on teacher preparation for SEL-related content and pedagogy, teachers' own SECs and the context of the classroom. Teachers are the engine that drives SEL practices in classrooms; their own SECs play an important role in the infusion of SEL into classrooms; therefore, it is important to prepare teachers for SEL (Lawlor, 2016).

Figure 6

Lawlor's Framework for Promoting the Prosocial Classroom in Educator

(An extension of Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)

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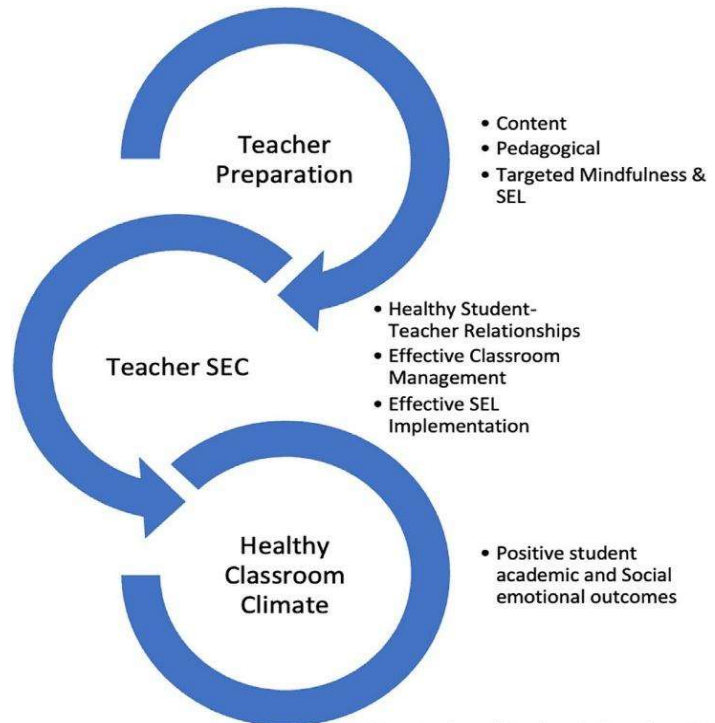
2.7.4. Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

The conceptual framework of this study is designed by integrating major theories and concepts from the existing literature to answer the research questions on SEL perceptions and practices among pre-service EFL teachers. Figure 7 presents the conceptual framework of this study, which includes two major components of perceptions and practices, as well as the international, national and institutional contexts that shape these perceptions and practices.

Figure 7
The Conceptual Framework of the Study
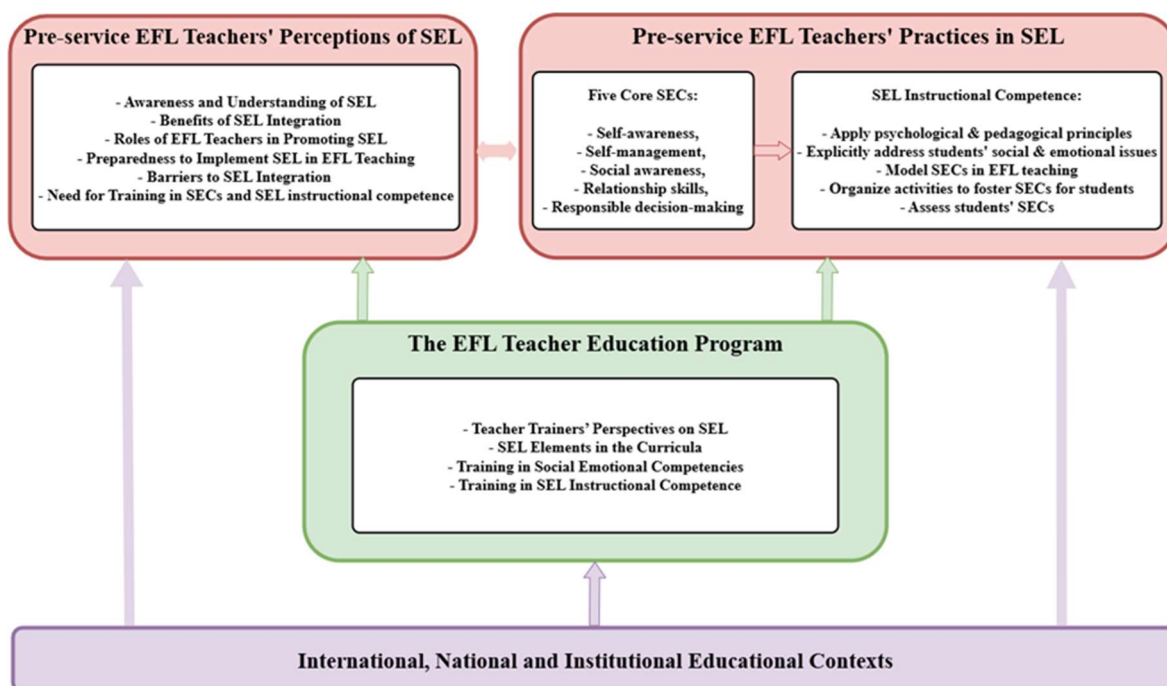
(1) The component of *"Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of SEL"* explores pre-service teachers' subjective understanding, beliefs and attitudes towards SEL. Elements within this component include their understanding of SEL concepts, benefits of SEL, roles of EFL teacher in promoting SEL, preparedness to implement SEL in EFL teaching, barriers to SEL implementation, and the need for training in SECs and SEL instructional competence. These perceptions can significantly influence their actual practices to incorporate SEL into their teaching practices.

(2) The component of *"Pre-service EFL Teachers' Practices of SEL"* examines the observable and reported implementation of SEL practices by pre-service EFL teachers during their professional learning. It encompasses how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate the five core SECs, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making within the classroom environment. Furthermore, it examines how pre-service teachers exhibit the five components of SEL instructional competence within their EFL teaching practices,

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including applying psychology and pedagogy, addressing students' social-emotional issues, modeling SECs, designing SEL-focused activities, and assessing students' SECs.

 (3) The domain of *"The EFL Teacher Education Program",* which includes SEL elements and teacher trainers' own perceptions and practices, is important for understanding how pre-service EFL teachers are trained in SECs and SEL instructional competence. It is conceptualized as the immediate environment that shapes pre-service teachers' perceptions and their actual practices in SEL. *SEL elements in the national and then institutional educational guidelines* were also taken into consideration. Understanding the national and institutional guidelines provides the broader context within which SEL perceptions and practices occur.

The conceptual framework acknowledges the interconnectedness of training, perception and practice in SEL. International, national and institutional contexts lay the foundation for SEL promotion within the teacher education program, which, in turn, influences pre-service teachers' training, perceptions and practices related to SEL. Practices, in turn, inform and reinforce ongoing training and perceptions. Furthermore, the conceptual framework stresses the reciprocal relationship between perceptions and practices. In this interactive process, pre-service teachers' beliefs and perspectives can influence their practices and conversely, their practices can shape and reinforce their perceptions. Finally, it emphasizes the necessity of examining all the three aspects of perceptions, training and practices as they are interdependent and create a cohesive research model.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II has provided a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical foundations relevant to the current study on SEL integration in Vietnamese EFL teacher education. First, it has discussed prevalent views of learning to lay the foundation for the introduction of SEL into education as a holistic approach to teaching and learning. The review has also explained the term SEL itself with detailed discussions on concept interpretations, approaches, guidelines for effective implementation and its benefits. Next, it has elaborated on SECs and SEL instructional competence, including their core components, development and assessment. The subsequent sections have reviewed how teachers perceive and implement SEL, the training they receive and their preparedness for SEL. This chapter has also reviewed the state of SEL implementation in the world and then in Vietnam, with a special focus on how SEL is integrated into general education, EFL instruction and teacher education. Finally, the chapter has identified research gaps and justified the focus of the current study, followed by a detailed description of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter justifies the methodological decisions employed in the study to comprehensively investigate the perceptions, practices and training in SEL among pre-service EFL teachers in the context of a pedagogical university in Vietnam. First, it explains why the study adopts a pragmatic philosophy, follows an abductive approach and employs an exploratory sequential mixed-method research design. Next, the chapter provides rationale for the use of various data collection methods, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews with EFL teacher trainers, focus group interview with pre-service teachers, classroom observation and a questionnaire. This chapter also justifies the cross-sectional time horizon for data collection and presents details regarding research context, research participants, data collection instruments and data analysis techniques. The chapter concludes by discussing the strategies for ensuring the quality and rigor of the research.

3.1. Research Context and Participants

The research takes place within a state-run pedagogical university in Vietnam, referred to as VPU for anonymity purposes. This university was selected via "*purposeful sampling*" strategy because it offers a well-established EFL teacher education program. Moreover the university is a familiar site to the researcher. This long-term professional affiliation with VPU is advantageous for the researcher as it allows for a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural context of the university and enables easier access to teacher trainers, pre-service teachers and relevant internal documents to yield rich, relevant and diverse data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Figure 8 summarizes the information of the research context and population.

VPU is one of the established institutions in Vietnam dedicated to training teachers and educational professionals at various levels. It offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in education, including Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees. These programs cover various fields of study, including pedagogy, psychology, educational management and subject-specific education. As a university of education, VPU places a strong emphasis on pedagogy, curriculum development and educational research. It is committed to fostering innovative teaching practices, promoting educational reform and advancing the quality of education in Vietnam. VPU plays an integral role in the local community by providing educational services, professional development opportunities and research projects.

Within VPU, the Faculty of Foreign Languages Education (FLEF) is responsible for administering the EFL teacher training program (ETTC). The program includes compulsory and elective courses in three main blocks, namely foundation, subject-matter

and professional knowledge. Foundation Knowledge includes courses such as Hochiminhism, Marxism, Vietnamese culture and Psychology, aiming to provide students with a broader understanding of social, cultural, political and psychological knowledge. Subject-Matter Knowledge focuses on English linguistics, covering courses like phonology, grammar and semantics, along with the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Professional Knowledge includes courses related to teaching methodology, teaching practices, teasting and assessment, field trips and practicum.

Figure 8
A Brief Overview of the Research Context
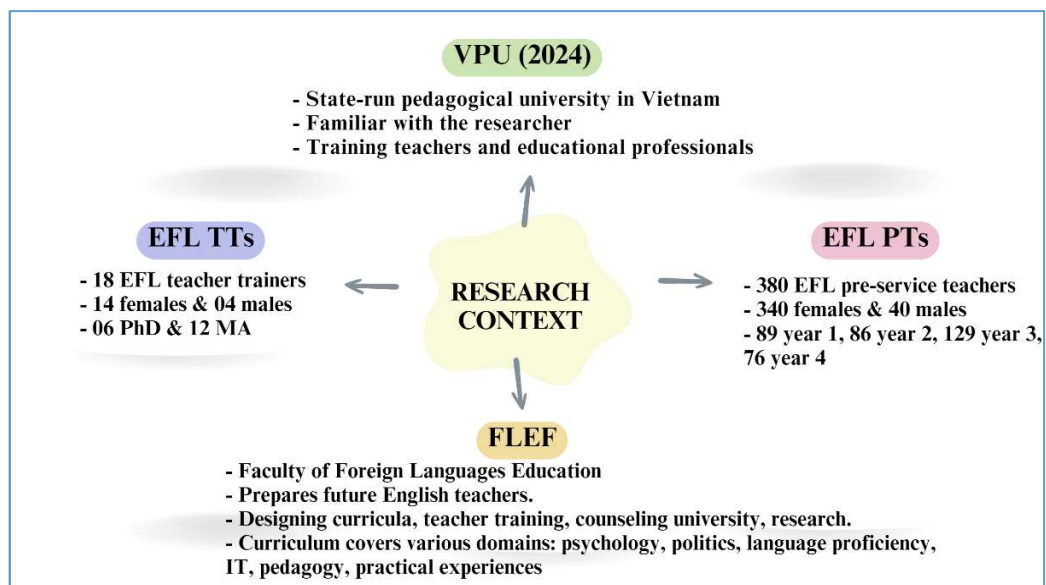
ETTC aligns with the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum (VGEC), which emphasizes holistic development by integrating moral, emotional and practical competencies alongside academic achievement. The VGEC aims to *"develop students' qualities and competencies through educational content that provides basic, practical and modern knowledge and skills; balances moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic development; emphasize the practical application of knowledge to solve problems in both academic and everyday contexts"* (p.4). VPU's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan reinforces these goals, focusing on *"good political and ideological qualities, comprehensive knowledge, professional expertise and adaptability for lifelong learning"* (p.11). Studying SEL in this context is significant as it provides an opportunity to see how SEL aligns with current Vietnamese educational goals and VPU guidelines.

Concerning he population of this research, it comprises all the pre-service EFL teachers who are undergraduate students enrolled in the EFL teacher education program of VPU (n=380). Pre-service teachers are currently EFL learners themselves, but in the future, they will become professional EFL teachers; therefore, SEL is of great significance for

them not only in their EFL learning process but also in their EFL teaching career. The program had an enrolment of about 380 pre-service EFL teachers in four different years when the data were collected (2023-2024). The EFL teacher trainers employed in FLEF of VPU (n=18) were also invited to participate in the study to provide complementary and triangulated data on pre-service teachers' training, perceptions and practices in SEL.

Regarding sampling, as the current research adopted the pragmatic philosophy and a mixed-methods sequential design, the sampling strategies varied for the different phases (Shukla, 2020). The purposeful sampling strategy was adopted in the qualitative phase to ensure that the qualitative data could capture the full range of views relevant to the research questions. Meanwhile, in the quantitative phase, a census approach was employed, surveying all the 380 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in the programme at the time of data collection, to ensure the collection of comprehensive, representative data.

3.2. Methodological Decisions Guiding the Study

This section justifies the major methodological decisions that guide the design and implementation of this study. These methodological decisions are presented visually in Figure 9, based on the "research onion" proposed by Saunders et al. (2019). The model presents the research philosophy, research approach, methodological choice, research design, time horizon and specific techniques for data collection and analysis.

Figure 9
Overview of Methodological Decisions Guiding the Study
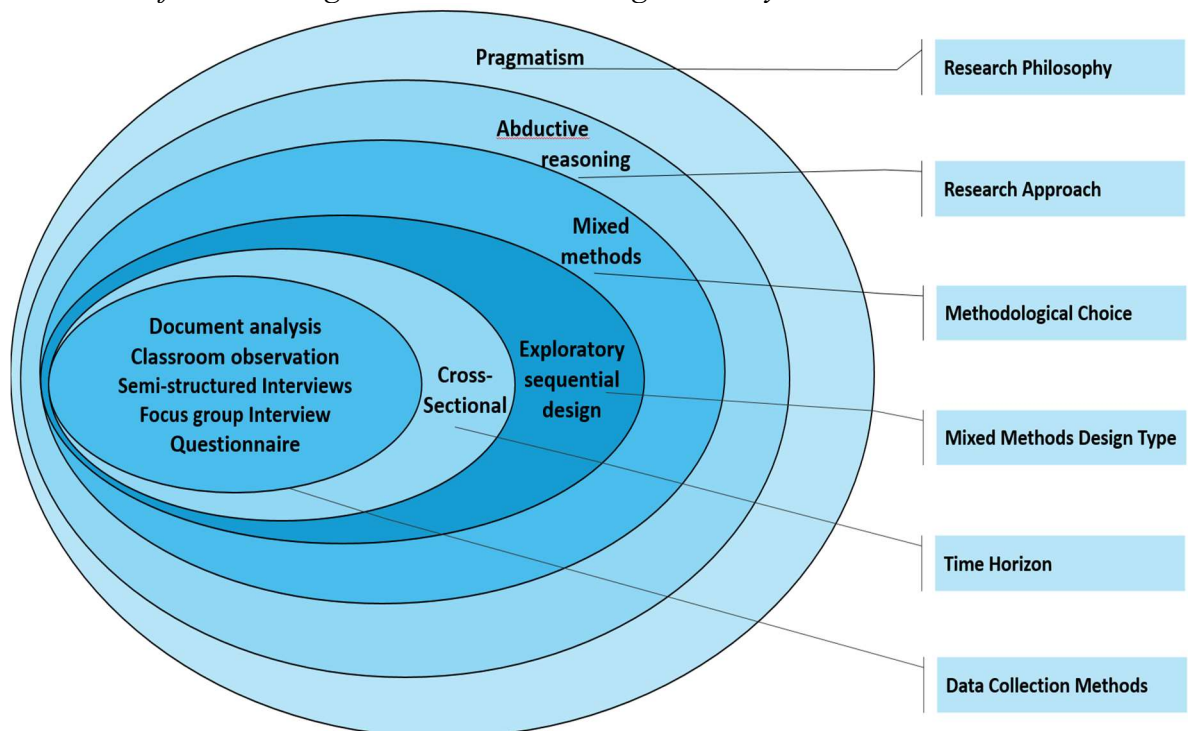
(Adapted from Saunders et al., 2019)

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As can be seen in Figure 9, a pragmatic philosophical stance was adopted, followed by an abductive reasoning approach. In the layer of methodological choice, mixed methods research was chosen, whereas in the layer of design type, exploratory sequential design is the most suitable. Finally, the data collection process includes document analysis, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and survey questionnaires, allowing for both in-depth qualitative exploration and broader quantitative generalization. The following subsections will provide a detailed rationale for each of these methodological decisions and a specific description of their applications in the current study.

3.2.1. Pragmatism as research philosophy

The current study adopts the pragmatic worldview, which allows for the use of all available research strategies, methods, and analytical tools to thoroughly answer its three research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Pragmatism ensures that the research remains problem-centered, contextually responsive and practically oriented so that the findings not only contribute to SEL theory but also offer practical recommendations for curriculum development, teacher training and policy reform (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). *Ontologically*, the study recognizes the existence of multiple realities constructed by different individual experiences of pre-service EFL teachers and teacher trainers regarding SEL. *Epistemologically*, the study could move between multiple data sources from any methods that best suit the study's objectives such as document analysis, interviews, focus groups, observations and questionnaire (Shannon-Baker, 2015). *Axiologically*, I value SEL, believing that SEL offers a holistic approach to general education, EFL instruction and teacher preparation.

3.2.2. Abductive reasoning as research approach

This study adopts an abductive reasoning approach, which involves moving iteratively between existing theoretical frameworks and emerging empirical data to refine interpretations throughout the process and generate meaningful findings (Saunders et al., 2019). With an abductive approach, the study could move back and forth between the quantitative and qualitative data and find points to connect the two types of data (Thomas, 2010). This iterative movement was necessary and consistent with the study's pragmatic orientation, which allows for methodological adaptability to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem.

To be more specific, in the qualitative phase with an inductive process, themes related to SEL training, perceptions and practices were gathered from interviews, classroom observations and curriculum analysis. Based on these themes, a measurement instrument (the questionnaire) was built and then validated. This quantitative phase reached a larger sample of participants and gain a broader understanding. However, during the

quantitative analysis stage, several unexpected patterns emerged. For example, the self-assessed competence in Self-Management was lower than anticipated; rather than interpreting this result in isolation, I returned to the qualitative dataset to examine this unexpected questionnaire finding and develop more accurate interpretations.

3.2.3. Exploratory sequential mixed-methods design

In this study, I decided to employ a mixed-methods design, which is defined by Mackey & Gass as *"research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings and makes inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study or program of inquiry"* (2015, p. 277). Mixed methods research can offset the weaknesses and combine the strengths of different methods to reach a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena through triangulation, complementarity and expansion (Mertens, 2005). Actually, the qualitative data can provide an in-depth exploration and give context for a deeper understanding, while quantitative data can provide a large numerical database, revealing prevalence, patterns and correlations across a larger sample.

Three issues that should be considered in a mixed methods design are the ***timing, weighting and mixing*** of the qualitative and quantitative data as can be summarized in Figure 10 (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the qualitative and quantitative data could be considered to be weighted equally and contribute differently to the research results. Concerning *mixing points*, I mixed quantitative and qualitative moethods at five points in the research process: planning, research questions formulation, data collection, data analysis and findings presentation. Regarding *timing*, the current study employed a sequential mixed methods design, beginning with an in-depth qualitative phase, followed by a quantitative phase that builds directly on the qualitative findings.

Figure 10
Decision Tree for Mixed Methods Design (adapted from Creswell, 2009)

```
                    Decision Tree for
                    Mixed Method Design
        ┌───────────────────┼───────────────────────────┐
      Timing             Weighting                     Mixing
     ┌────┴────┐        ┌────┴────┐         ┌─────────────┼─────────────┐
 Concurrent  Sequential  Equal   Unequal   Merge the   Embed the   Connect the
  timing      timing     weight   weight     data         data         data
                                           ┌───┴────┐
                                        During     During
                                        Analysis   Interpretation
```
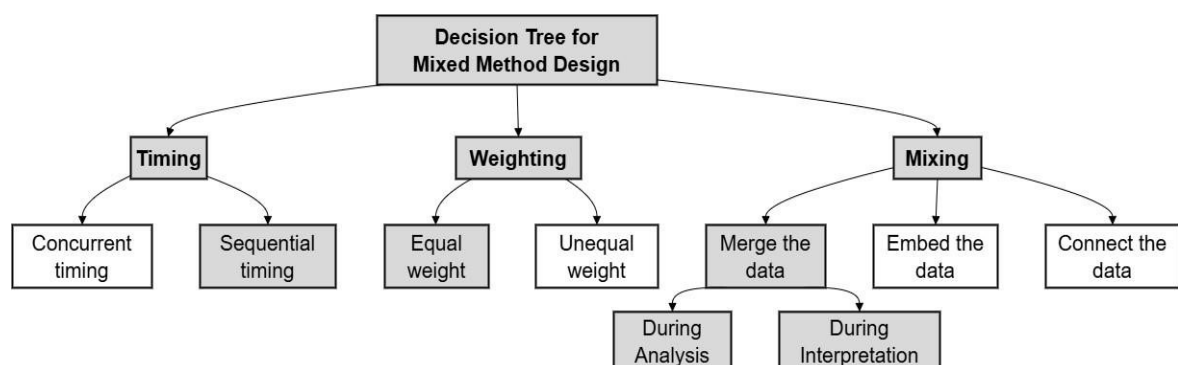
Among various mixed methods designs, *exploratory sequential research design* is selected for this study as its purpose is to explore an existing phenomenon (SEL) that has been under-researched in a specific educational context (EFL teacher education

program of VPU in Vietnam), followed by a quantitative phase that builds upon, validates and extends the qualitative findings. This design is also useful when a researcher needs to develop and then test a contextually appropriate measurement instrument or framework because instruments are not available, or to identify important variables to study quantitatively when the variables are unknown (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This sequence ensures that the quantitative instrument is not only theoretically grounded but also culturally meaningful and contextually relevant.

Figure 11

The Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design of the Current Study

QUALITATIVE Data Collection	- Document analysis of national & institutional documents - Semi-structured interviews with 05 EFL teacher trainers - Focus group interview with 13 pre-service EFL teachers - Classroom observations on teacher trainers & pre-service teachers
QUALITATIVE Data Analysis	- Coding & theme development on MAXQDA - Conceptual framework refinement
QUAL findings Inform QUAN questionnaire building	- Build a preliminary SEL framework for pre-service EFL teachers - Build a preliminary questionnaire: + Adapt existing survey items from prior studies + Generate new survey items based on QUAL findings + Consult with experts about the framework & questionnaire + Pilot test the questionnaire (n=38).
QUANTITATIVE Data Collection	- Administer the questionnaire to all pre-service EFL teachers in the program (n=380) - Statistical analyses on SPSS: + Conduct descriptive & correlational analyses;
QUANTITATIVE Data Analysis	+ Test reliability & validity: Cronbach's alpha, EFA, CFA & Regression - Finalize the framework & questionnaire.
Interpretation/ Reporting (Merging and Joint display)	- Merge QUAL & QUAN findings through joint display - Interpret convergence, complementarity & divergence across data sets - Gain holistic understanding of pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL.

Figure 11 illustrates the mixed methods in the exploratory sequential design broken down into two major phrases. Phase I involves qualitative methods, where document analysis, semi-structured interviews with teacher trainers, focus group discussion with pre-service teachers and classroom observation were conducted to provide a contextually rich exploration of how SEL is integrated (or overlooked) within the EFL teacher training program, how pre-service teachers perceive it, and how it is practised in classroom. The SEL skills, quotes, codes and themes generated from the qualitative phase were used to construct a SEL framework and a corresponding questionnaire for pre-service EFL teachers. While some items were adapted from the existing literature (e.g., Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Buchanan et al., 2009; CASEL, 2020), new items were derived from themes identified in the qualitative analysis.

For example, although the CASEL framework was used as a starting point to understand the five core SECs, it became clear through document analysis and interviews that their specific skills need to be adapted to reflect Vietnamese cultural values and the realities of EFL teaching practices. Based on qualitative findings, I adjusted the skills and even added new ones in the SEL framework, the classroom observation sheet and then the questionnaire. In addition, aspects of perception, such as how pre-service teachers interpret SEL, what benefits they see in applying it, and what challenges they face, emerged from interview data and were used to develop questionnaire items. To ensure validity, the draft instrument was reviewed by experts in teacher education and SEL. A pilot test with thirty-eight pre-service teachers was then conducted to refine the wording, structure and reliability of the instrument.

Phase II involves collecting quantitative data via the questionnaire with a census of 380 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in the program. Statistical procedures were conducted on SPSS to provide descriptive, correlational and regression data to measure the prevalence and distribution of SEL training, perceptions and practices as well as their relationships. Finally, the qualitative and quantitative strands were merged and displayed jointly via a thematic integration approach. Qualitative findings are presented first, followed immediately by quantitative results to highlight points of convergence, complementarity and divergence. This approach also enhances triangulation by allowing each theme to be demonstrated through both illustrative quotes and statistical data. It ensures a comprehensive, broad and deep understanding of pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions (RQ1) and practices of SEL (RQ2), as well as the influence of the teacher education program on these aspects (RQ3).

3.2.4. Cross-sectional time horizon

Another methodological decision that need to be made is related to the time horizon over which the study is conducted. Two types of time horizons are specified: the cross sectional and the longitudinal (Saunders et al., 2019). A cross-sectional time frame means that the aim of the study is to capture a snapshot of the research problem at a single point in time, whereas a longitudinal time horizon requires the use of repeated studies over a long period of time (Cohen et al., 2011). The emphasis of this study is to capture a snapshot of current training, perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers (a specific phenomenon) at one particular time frame (the 2023-2024 academic year) rather than longitudinally; therefore, this study is a cross-sectional study which does not aim to track changes over time, but to explore what was happening at the time of the study.

3.2.5. Techniques and procedures

As presented in the previous sections, this study necessitates both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Qualitative data were collected via document analysis, classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with teacher trainers, and focus group discussion with pre-service teachers, while quantitative data were collected via the questionnaire. In other words, multiple instruments were utilized to collect data from multiple sources (pre-service EFL teachers, teacher trainers and relevant documents) to add rigor, breadth and depth to the exploration (Bryman, 2006; Mertens, 2005).

Figure 12

Overview of the instruments used and how they align with the research questions

Procedure of Data Collection

Document Analysis	Semi-structured Interviews	Focus Group Interview	Classroom Observations	Survey Questionnaire
- Analyze national general education curricula to identify SEL elements. - Examine VPU's EFL teacher training curriculum for SEL training elements.	- Participants: 5 EFL teacher trainers. - Focus: SEL perceptions, practices, curriculum integration, assessment of pre-service teachers' SECs and SELIC, and recommendations for SEL.	- Participants: 13 pre-service EFL teachers. - Focus: SEL perceptions, practices (SECs and SELIC), self-assessment, preparedness, and recommendations.	- Participants: 15 sessions (trainers and pre-service teachers). - Focus: Trainer strategies for SECs and SELIC development, and pre-service teachers' demonstration of SECs and SELIC in practice.	- Participants: Census of 380 pre-service EFL teachers. - Focus: Demographics, SEL perceptions, practices (SECs and SELIC), and training in SEL.

Research Questions (RQ)	Instruments Used	Focus Areas
RQ1. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive SEL?	- Focus group interview with pre-service teachers (QUAL) - Questionnaire (QUAN)	- Awareness & understanding of SEL - Benefits of SEL - Roles of teachers in SEL - Preparedness for SEL - Perceived barriers & Training need
RQ2. How do they practise SEL within their professional learning?	- Interviews with teacher trainers (QUAL) - Focus group with pre-service teachers (QUAL) - Classroom observations (QUAL) - Questionnaire (QUAN)	- Demonstration of the five core SECs - Demonstration of the five components of SEL instructional competence
RQ3. How does the training program shape their perceptions & practices?	- Document analysis (QUAL+QUAN) - Interviews with teacher trainers (QUAL) - Focus group with pre-service teachers (QUAL) - Classroom observations of (QUAL) - Questionnaire (QUAN)	- SEL skills in the curricula - Teacher trainers' perspectives - Training in SECs & SEL instructional competence - Quantitative correlations/regressions

As can be seen in Figure 12, each research question was addressed through triangulated and complementary sources of data. Firstly, document analysis served as the foundation for understanding the training context by identifying SEL elements in national policy

documents and the teacher education curriculum. Semi-structured interviews with five teacher trainers were then conducted to explore their perspectives on their students' SEL training and practices. Additionally, a focus-group interview with thirteen pre-service EFL teachers provided exploratory data on their perceptions and practices of SEL as well as their training in SEL. Subsequently, classroom observations were conducted to observe how SEL is addressed by teacher trainers and how pre-service teachers demonstrate SECs and SEL instructional competence in practices. Finally, the questionnaire was built to depict patterns, distributions and relationships among SEL perceptions, practices and training across a broader population of pre-service teachers.

Regarding data analysis, data from document analysis, classroom observations, interviews and focus group were analysed qualitatively on MaxQDA, while data collected from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively on SPSS. The approach to presenting the results and findings is to combine quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings for better understanding of the research problem. Analyses focus on pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL as well as the way the program shapes these aspects. For convenience for data sourcing and referencing, pre-service EFL teachers participating in the focus group interview are coded as FIPT01-13; interviewed teacher trainers are coded as ITT01-05; observed teacher trainers are coded as OTT01-05; and observed pre-service teachers are coded as OPT01-13. For example, ITT01 means the data was taken from the semi-structured interview with teacher trainer 01. Table 2 provides a comprehensive analytical framework for analyzing pre-service EFL teachers' training, perceptions and practices in SEL, ensuring consistency in coding, theme development, and statistical analysis throughout the study.

Table 2
Analytical Framework of the Current Study

Domain	Details
1. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in SEL	
SEL Elements Addressed in the Curricula	- Specific skills under the five core SECs & SEL instructional competence.
EFL Teacher Trainers' Perspectives & Advocacy	- Understanding of SEL; Relevance of SEL in EFL teaching - Educators' roles in SEL & advocacy for SEL - Barriers to SEL & solutions
SEL Framework Development	- Building a framework for SECs & SEL instructional competence. - Factor analysis for validating the framework (EFA & CFA).
Training in SECs & SEL instructional competence	- Five core SECs: self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; responsible decision-making.
	- Five components of SEL instructional competence: Applying psychology & pedagogy; explicit use of SEL concepts; modeling SECs; designing SEL activities; assessing students' SECs.
2. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of SEL	
Awareness & Understanding	- Familiarity with SEL concepts - Interpretations of the term SEL - Understanding of the five core SECs
Perceived Benefits of SEL	- Benefits of SEL integration in EFL teaching

Perceived Roles of Teachers	- Roles of EFL teachers in promoting SEL.
Preparedness for SEL	- Preparedness to implement SEL in EFL teaching practices
Barriers to SEL	- Barriers to implementing SEL in EFL teaching practices
Training need	- Need for training in SECs & SEL instructional competence - Support needs & recommendations for SEL integration
3. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Practices in SEL	
Demonstration of five core SECs	- Self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; responsible decision-making.
Demonstration of SEL instructional competence	- Applying psychology & pedagogy; explicit use of SEL concepts; modeling SECs; designing SEL activities; assessing students' SECs.
Associations among the variables	- Relationships among SEL perceptions, practices & training

In the next sections, each data collection method will be described thoroughly in terms of their purpose, participants, development procedures and data analysis techniques.

3.3. Data Collection Methods and Data Analysis Techniques

In line with the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, this study employed multiple qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments, each selected to address the research questions from complementary perspectives. The instruments included document analysis, interviews with EFL teacher trainers, focus group with pre-service teachers, classroom observations, and finally a large-scale questionnaire.

3.3.1. Document analysis

3.3.1.1. Rationale for document analysis

The initial qualitative phase of the study began with a document analysis to ground the research within the broader national and institutional policy context. The analysis aims to explore whether SEL skills were explicitly addressed, implicitly embedded or entirely absent, as well as the extent to which they were emphasized. It provides essential policy and curricular background for understanding the SEL training context in which pre-service EFL teachers develop their perceptions and practices (Bowen, 2009). In addition, the list of SEL skills identified in these official documents helped adapt the SEL framework for pre-service EFL teachers and then build data collection instruments relevant to the Vietnamese educational context.

The selected official documents for analysis include the current national general education curriculum (VGEC) issued by Vietnamese MOET in 2018 and the EFL teacher training curriculum (ETTC) issued by VPU in 2022. Examining the current national general education curriculum could reveal how social and emotional skills are addressed or prioritized within broader educational reforms. As noted by Bowen (2009), this type of document serves as important sources of context, providing a legal framework and mandatory guidelines for what should be taught in the Vietnamese education system. At the institutional level, the EFL teacher training curriculum of VPU was analyzed to explore how SEL is integrated into the specific context of EFL teacher education at the

pedagogical university and how VPU promotes SEL within its EFL teacher training program by looking at SEL-related skills embedded in the learning outcomes, course content, assessment criteria, classroom activities and practicum guidelines.

3.3.1.2. Analysis of the data

Content analysis is utilized for document analysis in the current study. It involves systematically analyzing the content of the selected documents to identify both explicit and implicit SEL elements present within the curricula (Krippendorff, 2019). Both qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods were employed. *Qualitative* content analysis was utilized to examine the presence of SEL elements in coursework, teaching methods and assessments via textual data. On the other hand, *quantitative* content analysis helped assess the frequency and prevalence of specific SEL elements across different aspects of the curricula.

A defining feature of content analysis is the structured categorization of content using priori or predefined codes and categories before the commencement of data collection (Krippendorff, 2019). Therefore, a coding guide (see Table 3) was developed based on the CASEL framework and the SEL instructional framework to facilitate the analysis of SEL elements, including specific skills under the five core SECs and SEL instructional competence. However, alongside deductive coding, inductive coding was also employed to capture additional skills emerging from the Vietnamese educational context, for example, managing time effectively and overcoming academic challenges. This hybrid coding approach could preserve the core structure of the CASEL framework while also acknowledging how its specific skills are manifested in the Vietnamese context.

Table 3
Coding Guide for Document Analysis

No.	Documents	Aspects	Codes
1	The 2018 national general education curriculum (VGEC; issued by MOET, 2018)	- Standpoints - Goals & Objectives - Performance objectives of general competencies - Teaching methods - Assessment	Looking for skills explicitly or implicitly related to SEL, including: **- Social-Emotional Competences (SECs):** + Self-Awareness (SEA) + Social Awareness (SOA) + Self-Management (SEM) + Relationship Skills (RES)
2	The current EFL teacher training curriculum and its course syllabi of VPU (ETTC; issued by VPU, 2022)	- Objectives - Course outcomes - Main course contents - Teaching methods - Assessment	+ Responsible Decision-Making (RDM) **- SEL instructional competence (SELIC):** + Applying psychology & pedagogy + Explicitly addressing social-emotional issues + Modeling SECs in teaching + Designing activities to foster SECs + Assessing students' SECs

MAXQDA software was utilized to systematically organize and analyze the data related to SEL elements in the selected documents. Figure 13 shows a screenshot of the MAXQDA software interface used for qualitative data analysis in the current study, with

a focus on coding and organizing text segments into themes or categories relevant to the research questions (see Appendix E for a detailed codebook). Given that the documents being analyzed are originally in the Vietnamese language, only relevant sections of the documents were later translated into English for analysis and report.

Figure 13
Document Analysis on MAXQDA Software Interface
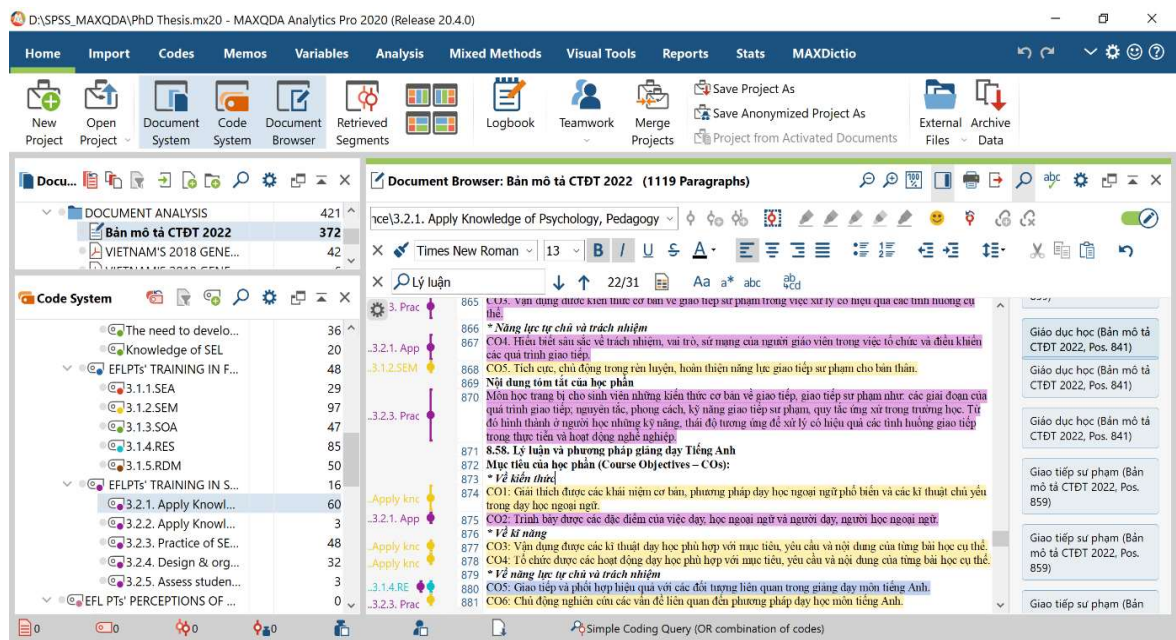
The process begins with importing the selected documents into MAXQDA. The next step involves creating a detailed coding system based on the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Codes are developed to identify and categorize both explicit or implicit SEL elements in the documents. Explicit SEL components are the elements that are directly and explicitly related to SEL such as communication skills, conflict resolution or empathy. By contrast, implicit SEL components refer to elements that may not be explicitly labeled as SEL but have the potential to contribute to social and emotional development. For example, if the syllabus includes group projects, collaborative activities or discussions that encourage students to work together, develop empathy and communicate effectively, these can be considered implicit SEL elements.

Once the coding system is in place, the data is systematically coded. Text segments in the documents are highlighted and marked with the appropriate codes. During this process, memos are written to record initial thoughts and interpretations about the coded data. After coding, MAXQDA's visualization tools are used to identify patterns, relationships and themes. The final step is to compile the analysis into a comprehensive report, using direct quotes or excerpts from the coded data to illustrate the main points

and support the findings. This structured procedure ensures that the qualitative data is analyzed rigorously to assess the presence of SEL elements in the selected documents.

3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews with EFL teacher trainers

3.3.2.1. Rationale for semi-structured interviews

Interviews are considered the main road to multiple realities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For the current study, the most appropriate type of interview was the semi-structured one, which offers both structure and flexibility. A semi-structured interview format enables the repetition of the interview process with various respondents and allows the interviewer to adjust questions in accordance with participants' responses, probe for more detailed information, clear up any misunderstanding and test the limits of the interviewee's knowledge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This was particularly important because SEL is still an emerging concept in Vietnamese teacher education. Many teacher trainers had never encountered SEL as a formalized framework but had extensive intuitive experience. This flexibility was essential for exploring rich perspectives into the training context that shapes pre-service teachers' SEL perceptions and practices.

Semi-structured interviews with five selected EFL teacher trainers were conducted to explore trainers' perspectives on SEL training within the context of EFL teacher education, focusing on how the program supports pre-service EFL teachers with SECs and SEL instructional competence. During the interviews, trainers offered valuable information about the curriculum, instructional strategies and resources available for SEL. They also assessed pre-service EFL teachers' understanding of SEL concepts, their practices in SEL and the challenges they face in implementing SEL. Moreover, they shared strategies and made recommendations to promote SEL in teacher education. Through these interviews, a range of perspectives among the teacher trainers could be gathered, enriching the depth and breadth of the investigation into the perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers at VPU.

3.3.2.2. Participants of the semi-structured interviews

Using purposive sampling, a total of five EFL teacher trainers were recruited for interviews. The principle of "maximum variation" was ensured so that a wide range of information could be obtained from a limited number of participants (Patton, 2015). Table 4 shows a summary of the profiles of the five EFL teacher trainers. To ensure confidentiality, the real names of the participants were replaced with codes consisting of "ITT" followed by a number (e.g. ITT01-05).

The recruitment of interview participants purposely addresses various courses, content area expertise, professional experience, gender, positions and age. Firstly, the interviewees need to be among the EFL teacher trainers employed in VPU, and hold

different positions in the EFL teacher training curriculum. For example, the Dean was able to provide broader perspectives while other teacher trainers can offer more specific perspectives. Secondly, the recruitment addresses diverse courses to gather broad perspectives across different courses within the curriculum. Thirdly, gender and age may also influence the participants' perceptions and practices. Fourthly, instructors need subject knowledge and practical experience to talk about the research problem; therefore, this research only recruited instructors with a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Finally, interviewees were selected based on their availability, helpfulness and interest in participating in the research. It is also important to note that these five teacher trainers would be observed during their lessons in the next phase of the study.

Table 4
Profile of the Semi-structured Interview Participants

Code	Gender /Age	Qualifi- cations	Position/ Professional Experience	Courses designed and taught
ITT01	Female 46	MA, TESOL	- Instructor, Teaching only - 24 years	ELT methodology, Teaching practices, IT, English skills
ITT02	Female 37	PhD, TESOL	- Former Head of ELT Division - 15 years	ELT methodology, Teaching practices, English skills, Research methods.
ITT03	Male 55	MA, TESOL	- Former Dean, - Currently teaching only - 32 years	English skills, Culture and literature, Phonetics & phonology, Grammar & syntax, Lexicology.
ITT04	Female 42	PhD, Education	- Dean - 19 years	ELT methodology, Teaching practices, Curriculum development, Study skills, Psychological counseling.
ITT05	Male 32	MA, TESOL	- Foreign Instructor, - 9 years	ELT methodology, Teaching practices, English skills

3.3.2.3. Development of the semi-structured interview protocol

The semi-structured interview protocol with EFL teacher trainers was developed based on the components identified in the conceptual framework to answer the research questions (see Appendix A). It is composed of 30 open-ended questions, which focus on investigating EFL teacher trainers' perspectives on SEL training, their practices in SEL training, their evaluation on pre-service teachers' knowledge, practices and preparedness related to SEL, the challenges and opportunities for SEL and their recommendations for SEL integration in teacher education. The interview questions were constructed by adapting items from well-established instruments of previous studies, including Elias et al. (2003), Greenberg et al. (2003), Zins et al. (2004), Triliva and Poulou (2006), Buchanan et al. (2009), Brackett et al. (2012) and Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017).

3.3.2.4. Reviewing and piloting the semi-structured interview protocol

Prior to conducting the interviews, the protocol underwent a thorough review by two academic supervisors, who were experts in the field, and then it was piloted with two experienced EFL teacher trainers, who were not selected for the official interviews. The purpose was to eliminate any ambiguity, lack of clarity or bias in the questions so that every participant could easily comprehend and provide meaningful responses, thereby strengthening its content validity and contextual appropriateness. Following these procedures, several adjustments were made. Some questions were reworded to be more accessible for participants with limited familiarity with SEL terminology. For example, the question *"How do you promote SEL in your EFL classes?"* was revised to *"Can you describe any classroom activities that help your students work well with classmates or make good decisions?"* In other cases, additional explanations were included. For instance, "*SEL instructional competence"* was explained as *"teachers' ability to design and implement activities that support students' social-emotional skills".*

3.3.2.5. Conducting the interviews

All the interviews with teacher trainers were conducted by the researcher on a face-to-face basis at the workplace from late December 2023 to early January 2024. Each interview was approximately 50 to 100 minutes, depending on the progression of the questions and participants' responses. During the interviews, the participants could ask for clarification, elaborate on ideas and explain their perspectives in their own words (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The scheduling, choice of venues and duration of the interviews were adjusted to suit the preferences of the teacher trainers to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable in their familiar places during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in either Vietnamese or English depending on participants' preference, and later transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Prompts and follow-up questions were also used to encourage elaboration or clarification.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were required to sign a consent form (see Appendix G). Then, the interviewer introduced herself to the respondents, informed the purpose of the interview, assured confidentiality and asked for permission to record the interview. Next, the interview proceeded with the prepared questions in a logical order, but neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions were fixed. This allows the interviewer to react to the emerging worldview of the respondents and new ideas on the topic. Follow-up questions for more specific or in-depth information were also used. All the interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes of preliminary analytical reflections. Every audio digital file was tagged with coded information about the participant, location, date and time. The participants could review the interview contents after it had been transcribed.

3.3.2.6. Analyzing semi-structured interview data

To analyze the interview data, the study employed thematic analysis following the six-step process as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022). Figure 14 summarizes the thematic analysis process step by step, demonstrating clearly how codes were applied, and then organised into themes in an iterative manner.

Figure 14
Illustrative Process of Thematic Analysis (adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006;2022))
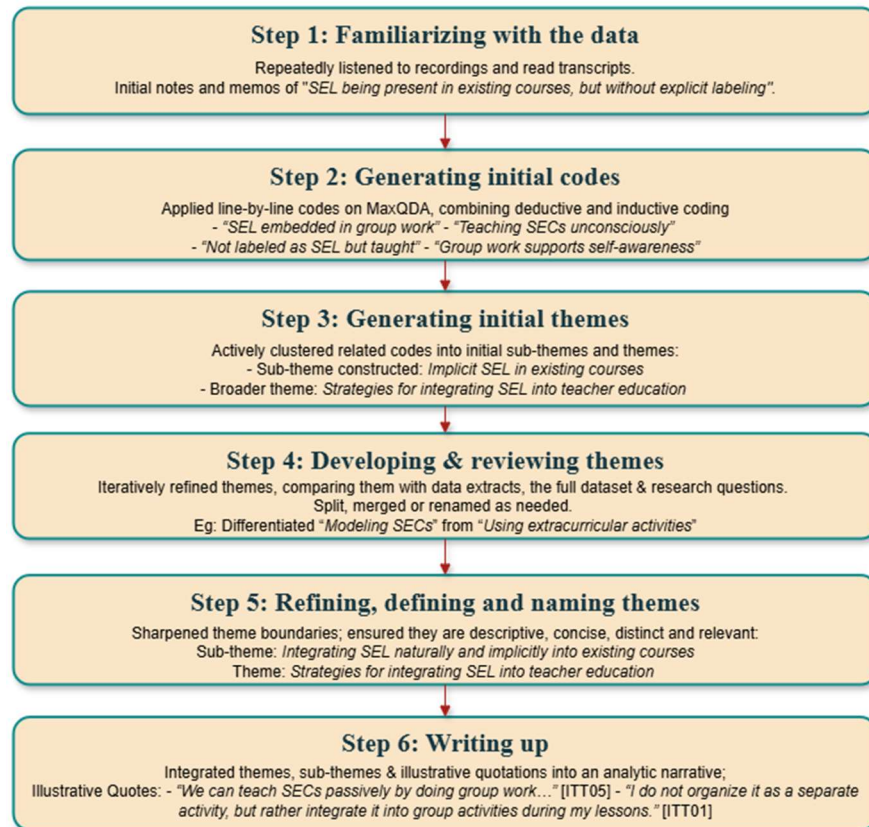
Step 1: Familiarizing with the data

After each of the interviews, I immediately transcribed the recordings in full using the Speech To Text V-IONE tool on vione.ai. I decided to transcribe all the utterances rather than summarize or select only relevant parts to ensure completeness. To enhance data accuracy and trustworthiness, I conducted member checks by emailing the transcripts to the participants for validation. Only one participant requested minor adjustments related to the language for formality. Then I repeatedly listened to the interviews and read the transcripts and the fieldnotes to check their accuracy, familiarize myself with the data and to gain an initial sense of key ideas. During this phase, I noticed recurring references to SEL skills, even though they were not explicitly labeled as SEL. I began to make initial notes of these impressions using memos.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Subsequently, I imported all the transcripts into MaxQDA so that I could apply line-by-line coding, organize them in a systematic but flexible manner, and then retrieve them conveniently (see Figure 15). I used a combination of deductive codes (guided by my conceptual framework) and inductive codes that emerged directly from the data. For example, codes such as *"SEL embedded in group work", "Teaching SECs unconsciously", "Not labeled as SEL but taught",* and *"Group work supports self-awareness"* were actively constructed from the participants' responses. I also used MAXQDA's memo and comment features to record my reflexive thoughts and assumptions during the coding process. Afterward, I translated the coded segments from Vietnamese to English. I chose free translation to convey the essence of the interviewees' message in a clear and easily readable manner, but I tried to stay as faithful as possible to their original intent (Holliday, 2007).

Figure 15
Semi-structured Interview Analysis on MAXQDA Software Interface
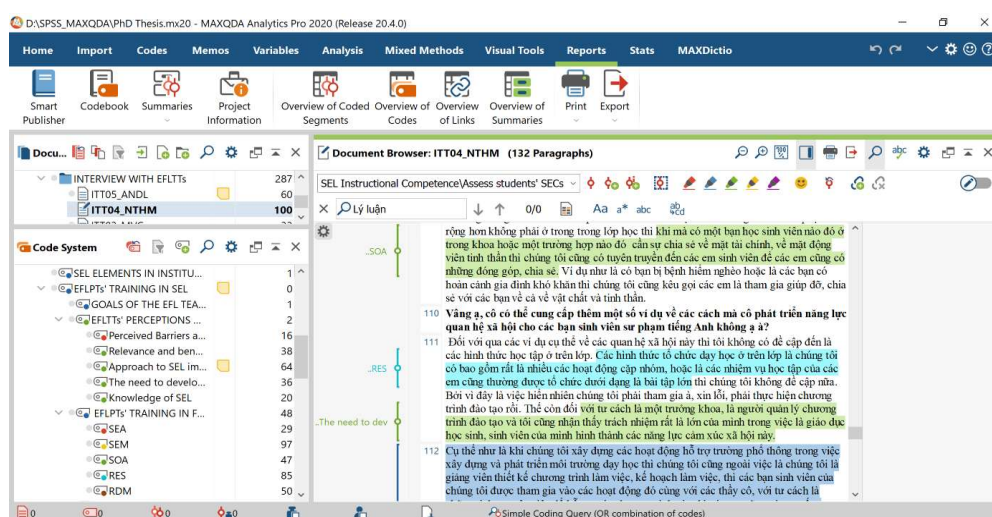
Step 3: Generating initial themes

In this step, I read the codes repetitively and grouped related ones into preliminary clusters that represented shared patterns of meaning or themes. I drew on the conceptual framework to guide the organization of themes and sub-themes, all with the aim of answering the research questions (Holliday, 2007). Initial themes, therefore, includes EFL teacher trainers' knowledge, advocacy, integration strategies, challenges and recommendations. The codes such as *"SEL embedded in group work", "Teaching SECs unconsciously", "Not labeled as SEL but taught",* and *"Group work supports SECs"* were organized into an initial sub-theme called *"Implicit SEL in existing courses."* Other sets of codes formed potential sub-themes such as *"Modeling SECs"* or *"Using*

extracurricular activities." These sub-themes were then situated within the broader theme of *"Strategies for integrating SEL into teacher education."*

Step 4: Developing and review themes

Once initial themes had been constructed, I moved into an iterative process of developing and reviewing them, which involved a two-level process of evaluation (Braun and Clarke, 2006). First, I assessed whether the codes within each theme demonstrated internal coherence to ensure they constitute a meaningful analytical unit. Second, I reviewed the themes in the context of the entire dataset to ensure they represented the breadth and diversity of the participants' perspectives. For example, the sub-theme *"Implicit SEL in existing courses"* was reviewed alongside related sub-themes such as *"Modeling SECs"* and *"Using extracurricular activities"* to ensure their conceptual distinctiveness. Where necessary, I split, merged, re-named themes, coded new data segments or re-coded the existing ones to ensure their internal coherence and distinctiveness from other themes.

Step 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

This step aims to define and finalize the themes to ensure they are descriptive, concise, coherent, distinct and relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I refined and finalized the themes by interpreting the underlying meaning of each theme and assigning concise and descriptive labels. For example, the theme *"Strategies for integrating SEL into teacher education"* was finalized to encompass multiple strategies, and *"Integrating SEL naturally and implicitly into existing courses"* was finalized as one of its sub-themes.

Step 6: Writing up

Once the preceding steps were completed, I could identify all the themes. Subsequently, I began incorporating and interpreting these themes along with their sub-themes into an analytic narrative to provide meaningful answers to the research questions. Quotations illustrating key points were selected to preserve participants' voices and strengthen the credibility of the analysis. For example, ITT05 noted, *"We can teach SECs passively by doing group work…"* while ITT01 shared, *"I do not organize it as a separate activity, but rather integrate it into group activities during my lessons."*

3.3.3. Focus group interview with pre-service EFL teachers

3.3.3.1. Rationale for focus group interview with pre-service EFL teachers

Focus group interview with a purposively selected group of 13 pre-service EFL teachers (coded as FIPT01-13) was employed because of their ability to generate rich qualitative data through engaging group interactions, detailed discussions, collective voices, shared experiences as well as diverse perspectives about their perceptions and practices of SEL

(Hennink, 2014). Moreover, the group interview format offers a natural and relaxed atmosphere for open and honest discussions among participants. This format can also elicit unanticipated perspectives that arise during discussions. As SEL is an unfamiliar concept, the group setting encouraged them to recall experiences, respond to peers' reflections, and build on each other's ideas. In addition, focus groups are cost-effective and enable the collection of data from multiple participants simultaneously.

3.3.3.2. Participants of the focus group interview

A purposive sample of 13 pre-service EFL teachers in their third, fourth and fifth year of the EFL teacher training program were selected for the focus group interview. There were seven females and six males, aged from 20 to 23. The participants were purposely chosen to ensure a balanced representation of gender, age and year in the training program. I contacted the targeted pre-service EFL teachers and invited them to participate in the focus group interview and explained the aim of the interview. When they agreed to participate in the research, they signed a Consent Form (see Appendix G). Then, I created a focus group on Zalo, where the participants could ask for any clarifications related to the interview.

3.3.3.3. Development of the focus group interview protocol

The focus group interview protocol was developed with a specific rationale, based on the research objectives and the extensive body of literature on SEL, including established research works by Brackett et al. (2012), Buchanan et al. (2009), Elias et al. (2003), Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017), Greenberg et al. (2003), Triliva and Poulou (2006), and Zins et al. (2004). It consists of 30 questions organized into three sections, corresponding to the three research questions (see Appendix B). Section 1 aims to investigate pre-service teachers' familiarity with SEL concepts, their views on the relevance of SEL in EFL education, their perceived roles for SEL, their preparedness, barriers to SEL, training need and suggested solutions. Section 2 aims to explore how they practiced SEL within their professional learning. They were asked about their specific practices related to the five core SECs and the five components of SEL instructional competence. Section 3 focuses on the integration of SEL within the teacher education program. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on how the EFL teacher education curriculum fosters their SECs and SEL instructional competence.

3.3.3.4. Reviewing and piloting the focus group interview protocol

The draft interview protocol underwent expert review by two specialists in teacher education to assess the clarity of questions and the appropriateness of language. A pilot focus group was then conducted with three pre-service EFL teachers outside the focus group sample to determine its validity. After these procedures, important changes were made. For example, in some questions, the term *SEL* was replaced with the phrase *"the*

social and emotional aspects of the learning process" to make it easier for the participants to understand and answer the questions based on their practical experiences and beliefs without being limited by unfamiliar technical terms. Specific examples of SECs, such as understanding emotions, respecting others and maintaining relationships were also added. Technical terms such as *"SEL instructional competence"* were avoided; instead participants were asked about the knowledge and skills needed to *"teach students how to manage emotions or build positive relationships."* New questions were also added to explore components of SEL instructional competence, such as *"How do you assess your students' social-emotional skills?".* These changes helped improve the clarity of the protocol and the likelihood of eliciting rich responses from the participants.

3.3.3.5. Conducting the focus group interview

The official focus group interview was conducted for three hours in a semi-structured format. April proved the most suitable time for collecting data from the pre-service teachers who had just returned to the campus after their seven-week practicum at school. The interview room was set up in a comfortable manner without microphones or cameras, for their use might inhibit the participants. Instead, two audiotape recorders were used to assist with transcriptions, and this choice was negotiated with the participants. The researcher acted as the moderator, posing questions, summarising, redirecting, probing, prompting, taking fieldnotes, encouraging equal participation, and maintaining thematic focus. Participants were invited to share personal perspectives, comment on peers' ideas, and provide specific examples from coursework, micro-teaching or practicum experiences. Throughout the interview, all the questions listed in the interview guide were posed; however, the order in which they were presented was flexible, depending on the natural flow of the discussion.

3.3.3.6. Analyzing focus group interview data

With permission from the interviewees, the focus group interview was audio-recorded to provide an accurate record of the interaction. This audio was then fully transcribed and was made available if requested to all interviewees for their review and confirmation of the accuracy of the transcriptions. Thematic analysis, which has been discussed in detail in section 3.3.2.6, was then utilized to identify emerging themes for analysis and interpretations. This analysis reveals the pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge, opinions, practices, preparedness, training and recommendations related to SEL (See Appendix E for the detailed code book).

3.3.4. Classroom observations

3.3.4.1. Rationale for employing classroom observations

Classroom observations were conducted to observe and record behaviors as they occur naturally in their socio-cultural context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). These

observations aim to capture behavioural manifestations of SECs and SEL instructional competence in authentic teaching and learning settings that cannot be fully accessed through self-report measures. Observations also aim to examine the strategies employed by teacher trainers to foster SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers, addressing how the teacher education program shapes their perceptions and practices of SEL. Observational findings were then used to triangulate with interviews and questionnaire to enhance the credibility of the findings (Cohen et al., 2011). For example, as pre-service teachers claimed in the focus group interview that SEL was often *"embedded unconsciously,"* observations confirmed this by documenting frequent use of cooperative and reflective tasks without explicit labeling as SEL.

3.3.4.2. Participants of the observations

Classroom observations involved five EFL teacher trainers (coded as OTT01-05), who had participated in the interviews and their corresponding classes of pre-service teachers (coded as OPT01-13). I examined the courses that the teacher trainers were teaching and chose five courses. The courses covered different areas of the curriculum, including coursework, micro-teaching and practicum, to ensure a variety of content and teaching methods could be observed. Selected courses include ELT methodology, micro-teaching practice, school-based teaching practicum, English skills, culture and literature and curriculum-related courses. This diversity allowed for the examination of how SEL practices might vary depending on the nature of the course.

3.3.4.3. Developing and piloting the observation sheet

The SEL Classroom Observation Sheet (see Appendix C) was carefully designed to guide the documentation of training and practice indicators of SEL in authentic classrooms. It was built upon the SEL framework, which was constructed and discussed in detail in section 4.1.3. Accordingly, the rubric included all the concrete behavioural indicators for each of the five SECs and SEL instructional competence, as well as a separate column for detailed descriptive fieldnotes. It also included rating scales (1-4) for each competence to evaluate the frequency and quality of SEL skills being trained and practiced in the classroom rather than simply noting its presence or absence (Yoder & Gurke, 2017). Prior to official data collection, the observation sheet was piloted during two micro-teaching sessions. Feedback from the pilot led to refinements in the layout of the observation sheet to ensure clarity and feasibility.

3.3.4.4. Conducting classroom observations

During March and April 2024, each of the five teacher trainers along with their classes of pre-service teachers was observed over three separate lessons, resulting in 15 classroom observations in total; each lesson lasted approximately 100 minutes. In addition, 13 pre-service EFL teachers were observed during their micro-teaching

practices at the pedagogical university and during their seven weeks of practicum at high school; each pre-service teacher was observed over one lesson of 45 minutes. Table 5 shows a detailed schedule of classroom observation sessions.

Table 5

Classroom Observation Schedule

Course	Teacher Trainers	Pre-service teachers	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Time
- Teaching Practice 1	OTT01	Year 1	Period 9-10; B2.103; Wed 20/3/2024	Period 9-10; B2.103; Wed 27/3/2024	Period 9-10; B2.103; Wed 03/4/2024	300
- Teaching Practice 2	OTT02	Year 2	Period 8-10; B2.203; Mon 25/3/2024	Period 8-10; B2.203; Mon 01/4/2024	Period 8-10; B2.203; Mon 08/4/2024	300
- Culture & Literature	OTT03	Year 3	Period 6-7; B2.304; Mon 18/3/2024	Period 6-7; B2.304; Mon 25/3/2024	Period 6-7; B2.304; Mon 29/4/2024	300
- English Skills 2, - Teaching Practice 2, - Writing 6	OTT04	OPT06-13 Year 3	Period 4-5; B2.203; Thur 21/3/2024	Period 4-5; B2.203; Thur 28/3/2024	Period 6-7; B2.201; Fri 29/3/2024	300
- Speaking 6, - English Skills 2	OTT05	Year 3	Period 6-7; B2.203; Wed 20/3/2024	Period 6-7; B2.203; Wed 27/3/2024	Period 6-7; B2.203; Wed 03/4/2024	450
- Practicum at School		OPT01-05 Year 4	Fri, March 15, 2024, English grade 10	Tues, April 2, 2024, English grade 10	Tues, April 2, 2024, English grade 11	225

(OTT01 = Observed teacher trainer number 01; OPT01 = Observed pre-service teacher number 01)

With the permission of the teacher trainers, I came to the classroom to ask for the consent of the students, and introduced the observation purpose. When the participants agreed to be observed, the observation sessions were conducted. Non-participant observation was adopted, which means conducting observations without participating in the activities being observed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Throughout the observations, I sat at the back of the classroom, trying not to disrupt the teaching and learning process. The observations followed the SEL observation sheet, focusing on how the teacher trainers modeled and fostered SECs and SEL instructional competence along with the pre-service teachers' corresponding behaviors related to SECs and SEL instructional competence. They were recorded with two audio recorders, but I also took detailed field notes to document descriptive details and my reflections.

3.3.4.5. Analyzing classroom observation data

Thematic analysis was used for analysing the descriptive and reflective field notes (see section 3.3.2.6 for more details about how thematic analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data). Field notes made during the observation sessions were read and reread and text marked to explore what SEL looked like in an actual classroom: how teacher trainers foster SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers, and how pre-service teachers practice SECs and SEL instructional competence in their EFL

learning and teaching practices. Non-verbal communications, including body contact, proximity orientation, posture, head-nods, facial expression, gestures and eye contact, were also recorded in field notes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). When necessary, these identifications could be checked against the recordings of the observations.

3.3.5. Questionnaire for pre-service EFL teachers

3.3.5.1. Rationale for employing the questionnaire

During the second phase of the study, a questionnaire was developed and then validated to collect quantifiable data from the entire cohort of 380 pre-service EFL teachers at VPU. Questionnaire data can reveal trends, patterns and variations among pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions, practices and training in SEL. They also helped determine the relationship among the key variables that have been hypothesized and presented in the conceptual framework of the study (see Figure 7). This was important for exploring not only how pre-service teachers perceive and practise SEL, but also how their training shapes these processes.

3.3.5.2. Participants of the questionnaire

Since the pre-service EFL teachers were accessed through one institution (VPU), it was not necessary to sample them. Instead, a census strategy was employed, whereby all the 380 pre-service teachers in the program were invited to participate; however, only 351 responses were obtained, indicating a relatively high response rate of 92.37%. They were in the age group of 20-24 and are in their first, second, third, fourth and fifth year in the program. Table 6 provides their demographic information. Among them, only 50 were male (14.2%), 298 were female (84.9%) and 3 chose other genders (.9%). Regarding year in the program, the table shows a relatively balanced distribution across the different stages of the program with 86 pre-service teachers (24.5%) in Year 1, 83 in Year 2 (23.6%), 115 in Year 3 (32.8%) and 67 in Year 4 (23.5%). The group is also homogeneous regarding age, ranging between 19 and 24.

Table 6
Demographic Information of Questionnaire Respondents

			Gender			Total
			Male	Female	Other	
Year in EFL Teacher Education Program	Year 1	Count	14	69	3	**86**
		%	16.3%	8.2%	3.5%	**24.5%**
	Year 2	Count	9	74	0	**83**
		%	1.8%	89.2%	.0%	**23.6%**
	Year 3	Count	19	96	0	**115**
		%	16.5%	83.5%	.0%	**32.8%**
	Year 4	Count	8	59	0	**67**
		%	11.9%	88.1%	.0%	**23.5%**
Total		**Count**	**50**	**298**	**3**	**351**
		%	**14.2%**	**84.9%**	**.9%**	**10.0%**

3.3.5.3. Developing and piloting the questionnaire

The development of the questionnaire followed a structured process developed by Merrell (2011). The process included six steps as can be seen in Figure 16: (1) defining the constructs based on the conceptual framework; (2) writing the question items to explore these constructs; (3) expert review and pilot testing to refine the questions; (4) fully administering the refined questionnaire to the main sample of 380 pre-service EFL teachers; (5) evaluating the effectiveness of the items in measuring the SEL constructs; and finally (6) validating the questionnaire. These steps ensured construct validity, contextual appropriateness, and psychometric robustness for the instrument.

The questionnaire was framed by the conceptual framework. The items were mainly derived from the findings of the qualitative phase in reference to the existing validated instruments which have been used previously concerning SEL perceptions, practices and training (see Table 7). Although existing instruments offered valuable items, none of them directly addressed pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam, therefore, the present study adapted relevant items while also generating new context-specific items based on the qualitative phase. For example, the domain of SEL perceptions includes items that explore participants' personal interpretations of SEL, their sources of SEL knowledge and the benefits they perceived in applying SEL. These items were drawn from both the literature and the qualitative data. Regarding practices and training in SEL, the study retained the five core SECs defined by CASEL but adapted the specific skills based on the findings from document analysis and interviews (see section 4.1.3).

Figure 16
Procedure of Questionnaire Development
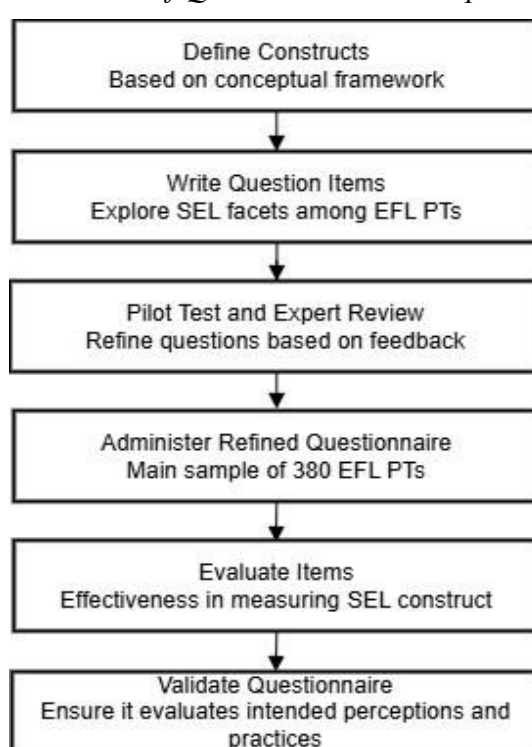
Table 7
Existing instruments Concerning Teachers' SEL Perceptions And Practices

Existing validated instruments	Authors	Objectives	Adaption for the current study
Student SECs assessment	CASEL, 2020	Assess students' five core SECs and their specific skills.	Assess pre-service EFL teachers' SECs.
SECs Questionnaire	Zhou & Ee (2012)	Measure five core SECs	Assess pre-service teachers' SECs.
SECs Checklist	AIR, 2019	Assess how teachers support SECs for students.	Investigate how SECs are fostered in the classroom

Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale	Brackett et al. (2012)	Develop a measure of teachers' beliefs about SEL	Investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of SEL
A National Teacher Survey on SEL	Bridgeland et al. (2013)	Evaluate the role and value of SEL in schools	Investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions about the benefits of SEL
A Survey of Teachers' Knowledge, Perceptions & Practices	Buchanan et al. (2009)	Examine teachers' knowledge, perceptions & practices in SEL	Examine pre-service teachers' knowledge, perceptions & practices of SEL
Teacher Perceived Support for & Attitudes about SEL	Schultz et al., (2010)	Assess administrative support for and teachers' attitudes about SEL programs	Assess administrative support for SEL and pre-service teachers' attitudes about SEL
Teacher Perceptions of SEL in PK–12 Schools	Huck et al. (2023)	Investigate teachers' knowledge, skills, training, experiences and barriers	Investigate pre-service teachers' knowledge, training and experiences and barriers

The questionnaire was partly translated into Vietnamese before being distributed in bilingual forms. It was first subjected to forward translation by the researcher, to produce a Vietnamese version that preserved the meaning and tone of the English items while ensuring accessibility for participants with varied English proficiency. Next, a lecturer with a background in applied linguistics and no prior exposure to the original instrument carried out a back-translation of the Vietnamese draft into English. The forward and back-translated versions were then compared and discussed. Revisions were made to resolve inconsistencies, refine terminology and adjust phrasing to ensure equivalence across the English and Vietnamese versions of the survey.

The draft instrument also underwent expert review by two specialists in educational psychology and teacher education. For the pilot test, the questionnaire was distributed to 38 pre-service EFL teachers who had graduated from the program the previous year. The pilot helped test the clarity of the items and to ensure that responses were relevant and sufficient to answer the research questions. After the pilot, the structure of the questionnaire were modified: the items were recategorized under seven main parts, revolving around the three key constructs of the conceptual framework to make it easier for the participants to follow. Some irrelevant items were eliminated, and some were clarified in terms of wording.

The final version of the questionnaire contained 37 items distributed across seven parts. Each section has several closed-ended items, including multiple choice and multiple answer questions. The Likert scale was employed in the survey, using five points where the third point in the middle represents neutrality (Likert, 1932). The internal consistency of each construct was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with results ranging from .796 to .972, indicating that the scales were reliable for measuring perceptions, practices and training in SEL among the pre-service EFL teachers. Table 8 summarizes the detailed constructs of the survey questionnaire along with their reliability indices.

Table 8

Constructs of the Survey Questionnaire for Pre-service EFL Teachers

No.	Construct	Description	Questions (QI)	Cronbach's Alpha
0	**Entire questionnaire**	Explores pre-service EFL teachers' SEL perceptions and practices within the teacher education context.	37 (QI.1-37)	.967
1	**Demographic Information**	Collects basic demographic details: age, gender, educational background & teaching experience.	7 (QI.1-6)	
2	**Perceptions of SEL**	Explores how they define SEL, perceive its benefits and their role in fostering students' SECs.	6 (QI.7-11)	.911
3	**Practices in SECs**	Examines their actual practices in the five core SECs.	5 (QI.12-16)	.915
4	**Practices in SEL instructional competence**	Examines their demonstration of SEL instructional competence in teaching practices.	6 (QI.17-22)	.955
5	**Training in SECs**	Assesses how the EFL teacher education program at VPU fosters SECs for pre-service teachers.	8 (QI.23-28)	.938
6	**Training in SEL instructional competence**	Assesses how the program fosters SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers.	5 (QI.29-30)	.796
7	**Preparedness for SEL**	Investigates pre-service teachers preparedness to implement SEL in EFL teaching.	9 (QI.31-37)	.972

3.3.5.4. Administering the questionnaire

The questionnaire was launched in May 2024 in the classrooms of the students on the campus within the regular school day. The questionnaire was delivered via Google Form for the convenience of data collection and management. Each respondent could access the survey on their personal devices (laptops, tablets, or smartphones) while maintaining anonymity. However, to increase response rates, I came to scheduled class meetings to meet face-to-face all the targeted respondents, introduced the research aim and all the sections of the questionnaire, and then gave instructions to the participants on how to complete the questionnaire step by step. Only when the rapport had been established, I opened the links for the respondents to complete the questionnaire. This strategy could ensure the efficiency of the data collection process as it allowed for direct interaction and immediate clarification of any uncertainties during the process.

3.3.5.5. Analyzing questionnaire data

All the survey responses from the respondents were recorded in an Excel worksheet and then were transferred to SPSS version 20 for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, mode and standard deviations were calculated to describe demographic information and responses on perceptions, practices and training related to SEL. To provide a clearer understanding of the data, the mean scores from the scales

were grouped into five distinct descriptive levels: very low (below 1.5), low (1.5–2.5), moderate (2.5–3.5), high (3.5–4.5), and very high (4.5–5) (Likert, 1932).

ANOVA is also employed to determine if there are statistically significant differences in SEL perceptions, practices and training among different subgroups of pre-service EFL teachers such as age, gender or training years. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is conducted to identify the underlying constructs within the survey items related to SEL practices. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the AMOS software follows EFA to confirm the validity and reliability of the identified factor structure of the SECs and SEL instructional competence measurement model. Correlation analysis is conducted to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationships between perceptions, practices and training. Regression Analysis goes further to quantify the predictive power of SEL training and perceptions on SEL practices, contributing to understanding the influence of the teacher education program on SEL perceptions and practices.

3.4. Strategies for Ensuring the Quality and Rigor of the Research

To ensure the quality and rigor of the research, several strategies were systematically implemented throughout the data collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation phases. These strategies, including triangulation, systematic participant selection, member checking, peer review and reflexivity, could enhance the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the findings and provide a strong foundation for drawing conclusions and making informed recommendations.

3.4.1. Clear research design

The research design employed in this study was carefully structured to align with the study's objectives. Adopting an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, the study is divided into two distinct phases: first, a qualitative phase where data is collected and analyzed, and then a quantitative phase that builds upon the qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The detailed description and justifications of the research procedure significantly contribute to its dependability and replicability. Therefore, despite being conducted in a specific pedagogical university in Vietnam, the research findings can apply to a broader group of pre-service EFL teachers in similar contexts. This helps the study enhance its transferability and allows the reader to assess the applicability of its findings to their own contexts (Shenton, 2004).

3.4.2. Triangulation

Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility of the study's findings by integrating multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources. Since reality cannot be fully understood through a single method, triangulation enhances validity and reliability

by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Golafshani, 2003). Actually, in this study, the integration of document analysis, interview with teacher trainers, focus group interview with pre-service teachers, classroom observations and survey findings allowed for the convergence, complementarity and expansion of the findings, thereby supporting a more comprehensive understanding of pre-service EFL teachers' SEL perceptions and practices.

3.4.3. Data collection instrumentation, participant selection and sampling

The development of data collection instruments, including interview guide, focus group protocol, observation sheet and survey questionnaire is based on established theoretical frameworks, conceptual framework, the findings from the previous phase of the study, and the established instruments in the literature on SEL. The instruments underwent rigorous review and piloting to enhance their clarity, relevance, reliability and validity (Golafshani, 2003). The selection of participants was also systematic and well-justified to ensure representation and diversity within the sample. Pre-service EFL teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum documents were strategically selected to provide a comprehensive exploration of the research problem. Sample sizes were determined based on the principles of saturation and adequacy to ensure the depth and richness of the data (Shukla, 2020).

3.4.4. Member checking and peer review

In the qualitative phase of the study, to ensure coding reliability, two researchers independently coded approximately 20% of the qualitative data set. Discrepancies in coding were then discussed and resolved to reach a shared agreement. The agreed coding guide was then applied to the entire data set. Member checking was also conducted to enhance the trustworthiness and confirmability of the findings (Birt et al., 2016). All the interview participants were invited to verify the transcripts, the preliminary themes and the corresponding interpretations to ensure that their perspectives were accurately interpreted and represented in the research. In addition, peer review was conducted via the process of seeking feedback from experts and researchers in the same field when the research findings were presented at international conferences or published in scientific journals. These channels provided external validation and constructive critiques, strengthening the overall credibility of the research findings.

3.4.5. Reflexivity and researcher positionality

Throughout the research, I constantly reminded myself of my special position as both a researcher and a teacher educator within the research site, as this positionality could impact participants' responses, my data analysis and interpretations, and the overall research findings. I maintained an impartial and objective position to set aside my own

experiences and prior knowledge, and to ensure that data is gathered, analyzed and interpreted accurately and ethically. I always emphasized to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the research aimed to gather real opinions and experiences. I also engaged in continuous and systematic reflexivity throughout the research process by keeping analytic memos and a reflexive journal, in which I recorded my assumptions, emerging ideas, emotional reactions and potential biases (Finlay, 2002). These strategies ensured that the findings were grounded in the data, and not influenced by my personal assumptions or prior knowledge.

For example, when analyzing interview data from pre-service teachers, I noticed that many participants claimed they had not received training in SEL. At first, I felt quite disappointed and skeptical about these responses; however, I kept reminding myself to patiently and objectively listen to diverse viewpoints. I recorded my emotional reactions in my reflexive journal and ensured that I need to ensure my personal emotions do not influence my interpretation of the data. Instead of assuming that SEL was overlooked, I need to analyze the curriculum and their responses objectively to determine what SEL-related training was actually provided. This reflection helped me acknowledge my emotions and ensure that my analysis remained unbiased and evidence-based.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The current study involves collecting various types of data from diverse participants; therefore, I placed a strong emphasis on ethical considerations to protect the rights, well-being and privacy of all the participants involved. The following ethical considerations have been carefully addressed throughout the planning, execution and presentation stages to reduce any risks to participants.

3.5.1. Access and acceptance

Access and acceptance are important ethical issues in the research (Cohen et al., 2011). In order to obtain the official permission to conduct the study, I sent a letter explaining the aim of the research and the types of data required to the Rector of VPU. Before starting the data collection, I received the official letter of approval (see Appendix G) and a copy of it was sent to the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages Education. The Dean in turn forwarded the letter to the Heads of the different academic departments to provide the necessary cooperation and assistance in conducting the study.

3.5.2. Informed consent

Informed consent involves participants agreeing to participate in research after being fully informed about the study's purpose, data usage, potential risks and benefits (Cohen et al., 2011; Patton, 2015). Prior to any data collection of my study, informed consent is

obtained from all participants, including EFL teacher trainers and pre-service teachers. They are provided with information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits. They were also informed that participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any point without consequences (see Appendix G).

3.5.3. Anonymity and confidentiality

Confidentiality involves disguising the identities of the participants to protect their privacy and anonymity (Patton, 2015). In this study, the participants were informed that the data gathered would be securely stored and used for the research purpose only. Data collected from the interviews, observations and questionnaire are coded or anonymized so that individual responses could not be linked to specific participants. The participants were also assured that they would not be identified by name in the report of the findings of the study. For example, a unique code was assigned to each teacher trainer (e.g. ITT01) and pre-service teacher (e.g. FIPT01) to ensure that the results were reported anonymously without mentioning the respondents' names.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 has outlined the research methods employed to investigate the perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers at VPU. It has provided a detailed description of the research context and population before presenting justifications for each of the methodological decisions. The pragmatic philosophy allows for methodological flexibility and relevance; abductive reasoning supports iterative interpretations; mixed methods ensure depth and breadth; the exploratory sequential design aligns with the emerging nature of the research problem; and the cross-sectional time frame captures the current situation. The chapter has also elaborated on the data collection instruments and data analysis methods, which include document analysis, semi-structured interviews with five teacher trainers, one focus group interview with 13 pre-service teachers, classroom observations, and finally a questionnaire for a census of 380 pre-service EFL teachers at VPU. Finally, the chapter has detailed the strategies for ensuring research quality and rigor, along with ethical considerations. The next chapters (4-6) will present the data analysis results and the findings thematically in alignment with the study's three research questions, focusing on pre-service EFL teachers' training, perceptions and practices in SEL, as well as the correlations among these aspects.

CHAPTER 4: PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' TRAINING IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Chapter 4 presents the findings to illuminate the training context within which pre-service teachers develop their perceptions and practices of SEL. The chapter first focuses on the SEL skills addressed in the educational curricula and then investigates teacher trainers' perspectives as well as opportunities for pre-service teachers' training in SEL. The aim is to examine the extent to which SEL is intentionally embedded, implicitly addressed or left underdeveloped. This contextual understanding enables a more comprehensive interpretation of pre-service teachers' perceptions (Chpater 5) and their SEL practices in classroom and practicum settings (Chapter 6).

4.1. Elements of Social Emotional Learning Addressed in the Curricula

The focus of this section is on examining how SEL is formally incorporated into teacher education at VPU, focusing on identifying which SEL skills and SEL instructional competence components are addressed in both the national general education curriculum and the EFL teacher training curriculum of VPU. Analysis results were then used to build the SEL framework for pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam, which covers both SECs and SEL instructional competence. This framework will guide the exploration of perceptions, practices and training in SEL within the context of Vietnamese education.

4.1.1. Specific social emotional skills addressed in the curricula

This section focuses on a detailed analysis of the social emotional skills addressed in two important educational curricula: Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum (VGEC) and the EFL teacher training curriculum at VPU (ETTC). The analysis quantifies the frequency of references to these skills under the five core SECs, namely Self-Awareness (SEA), Self-Management (SEM), Social Awareness (SOA), Relationship Skills (RES) and Responsible Decision-Making (RDM). Figure 17 illustrates the distribution of SECs and the degree of emphasis placed on each competence in the national and institutional curricula. The total number of instances of SECs identified in the national curriculum is 36 and the instances in the institutional curriculum is 238. These numbers indicate a significant emphasis on SECs within both curricula.

It is interesting to note that the numbers of references to the five core SECs between the national curriculum and the institutional curriculum demonstrate a proportional relationship, indicating a coherent alignment in their focus. Self-Management (SEM) has the highest number of instances, with 12 in the national curriculum and 82 in the institutional curriculum. Self-Awareness (SEA) has the smallest number of instances in both curricula, with 3 instances in the national curriculum and 11 in the institutional curriculum, reflecting a minimal but consistent emphasis. Social Awareness (SOA) and Relationship Skills (RES) receive a moderate and consistent emphasis across both

curricula, with 4 and 31 instances for SOA and 8 and 71 instances for RES, respectively. Responsible Decision-Making (RDM) shows a proportional relationship as well, with 8 instances in the national curriculum and 43 in the institutional curriculum, being the fourth most emphasized competency in both curricula. This pattern suggests that the national curriculum's guidelines are effectively specified in the institutional curriculum.

Figure 17
Distribution of SECs in the Curricula

Code System	VPU EFL Teacher Education Curriculum	VIETNAM'S 2018 GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM	SUM
Performance objectives of General Comp			1
SEA			3
SEM			12
SOA			4
RES			8
RDM			8
EFLPTs' Training in Five Core SECs			0
SEA			11
SEM			82
SOA			31
RES			71
RDM			43
Σ SUM	238	36	274

Table 9 shows that a broad range of social-emotional skills are incorporated, but with significant variation in explicitness. Although the curricula rarely use SEL concepts directly, many of the competencies, objectives and outcomes identified align with the five core SECs. Relationship skills and self-management are the most explicitly addressed, embedded through teamwork, group projects and professional responsibilities. Social awareness is also present but remained implicit. Self-awareness and responsible decision-making, by contrast, are less emphasised, appearing primarily in reflective tasks. It can be seen that the curriculum offer pre-service teachers opportunities to develop SECs, but the implicit and uneven integration helps explain why pre-service teachers later reported fragmented understanding and intuitive practices of SEL.

Table 9
Examples of Specific SEL Skills Addressed in the Curricula

Self-awareness skills
"Understand one's own emotions" [VGEC, p. 43].
"Asserting and protecting their legitimate rights & needs" [VGEC, p. 43].
"Evaluate strengths and limitations" [VGEC, p. 43].
"Recognize one's own personality and values" [VGEC, p. 44].
"Demonstrate self-confidence and optimism" [VGEC, p. 43]; *"Build self-confidence & positive thinking for success"* [ETTC, p. 401].
Self-management skills
"Adapt thinking and emotional responses to meet new requirements and circumstances" [VGEC, p. 44]; *"Adapt to diverse working environments"* [ETTC, p. 307].
"Set specific, detailed learning goals " [VGEC, p. 45]; *"Create action plans with appropriate resources"* [VGEC, p. 49].
"Embrace & overcome challenges in study and life" [VGEC, p. 44]; *"Persistently execute study and work plans"* [VGEC, p. 44].
"Avoid social evils" [VGEC, p. 44];

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"Maintain good political and moral qualities" [ETTC, p. 16].
"Take initiative and actively engage in personal tasks in study and life" [VGEC, p. 43].
"Complete tasks on time" [ETTC, p. 63].
Social awareness skills
"Love and care for everyone" [VGEC, p. 39]; *"Spreading positive values"* [ETTC, p. 335].
"Identifying the needs and capabilities of collaborators" [VGEC, p. 47]. *"Apply knowledge about different learners"* [ETTC, p. 37].
"Analyzing & evaluating perspectives in debating political, economic and social issues" [ETTC, p. 149].
"Respect differences among people" [VGEC, p. 39]; *"Apply political & social knowledge to promote respectful behavior in practical activities"* [ETTC, p. 33].
"Understand the cultural values of English-speaking countries" [ETTC, p. 586]; *"Apply knowledge of cultural differences in communication" [ETTC, p. 480].*
Relationship skills
"Establish and develop social relationships" [VGEC, p. 46]; *"Develop cooperation and problem-solving skills"* [ETTC, p. 160]; *"Proactively communicate with international friends"* [VGEC, p. 48].
"Identifying the purpose, content, means and attitude for communication" [VGEC, p. 45]; *"Understand the role of cultural factors in communication"* [ETTC, p. 762].
"Working in groups" [ETTC, p. 52]; *"Develop communication, teamwork and cooperation in learning"* [ETTC, p. 850].
"Adjust and resolve conflicts" [VGEC, p. 46]; *"Evaluate cooperative activities"* [VGEC, p. 47].
"Gather and coordinate the necessary resources" [VGEC, p. 49]; *"Develop both independent and group work skills"* [ETTC, p.312].
Responsible decision- making skills
"Identify and clarify new and complex information from different sources" [VGEC, p. 48]; *"Search, analyze, synthesize and compare information"* [ETTC, p. 581].
"Synthesize information into theories for practical application in education" [ETTC, p. 339]. *"Apply legal knowledge to real-world situations"* [ETTC, p. 210].
"Collect relevant information, propose & analyze solutions" [VGEC, p.49]; *"Exploit information sources for problem-solving"* [ETTC, p. 638].
"Propose new ideas in learning and life" [VGEC, p. 48]; *"Develop creative thinking to solve problems in learning and teaching"* [ETTC, p. 367].
"Evaluate the effectiveness of solutions and activities" [VGEC, p. 49]. *"Synthesize information into theories for practical application in education"* [ETTC, p. 339].

4.1.2. Components of SEL instructional competence addressed in the curriculum

Turning to SEL instructional competence (SELIC), the analysis of the EFL teacher training curriculum of VPU shows varied levels of emphasis and explicitness of its components (see Figure 18). The most strongly emphasized component is *"Applying knowledge of psychology & pedagogy"* (SELIC 1), which is referenced 57 times, indicating that the curriculum places a strong emphasis on foundational theories of teaching methods, classroom management and learner development necessary for effective teaching. "Modeling SECs in teaching" (SELIC 3) is also frequently referenced at 44 times. This frequency reflects the curriculum's commitment to ensuring that pre-service teachers model social-emotional skills in teaching. *"Designing activities to foster SECs for students"* (SELIC 4) is moderately emphasized with 23 references, but they are addressed in an implicit manner and not labelled as SEL. It is notable that the curriculum places minimal emphasis on *"Using explicit SEL concepts"* (SELIC 2) and *"Assessing students' SECs"* (SELIC 5), with 3 references each.

Figure 18

Components of SEL Instructional Competence Addressed in the Curriculum

Code System		
EFLPTs' Training in SEL Instructional Competence		0
Apply knowledge of psychology & pedagogy	■	57
Address social and emotional issues explicitly	·	3
Model SECs in EFL teaching	■	44
Design & organize activities to foster SECs for students	■	23
Assess students' SECs	·	3
∑ SUM		130 130

SELIC 1	*"apply knowledge of psychology, pedagogy & classroom management"; "analyze theories on child development".*
SELIC 2	*"support students in overcoming psychological difficulties." "handle teaching situations flexibly"; "apply counselling skills".*
SELIC 3	*"communicate effectively"; "adhere to ethical standards."*
SELIC 4	*"organise extracurricular activities"; "design project-based learning"; "implement experiential learning in multicultural environments."*
SELIC 5	*"apply methods and techniques to assess students' progress focusing on development of their qualities and competencies."*

In summary, document analysis reveals that SEL-related skills are integrated into the curricula; however, because they are not explicitly labeled or taught as SEL-oriented competencies, pre-service teachers often fail to recognize them as part of a coherent framework. This finding helps explain why pre-service teachers later reported fragmented understanding of SEL and tended to rely on implicit, intuitive practices rather than intentional strategies.

4.1.3. Developing a framework of SEL for pre-service EFL teachers

The development of a SEL framework for pre-service EFL teachers is an important step for specifying, developing and then assessing SEL competencies. The process involved anchoring the framework in a globally recognized framework (CASEL), aligning SEL competencies with Vietnamese educational values, expanding the framework to include SEL instructional competence, and finally validating the framework. This framework provided a foundation for developing research instruments that were both theoretically robust and contextually appropriate to examine pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions, practices and training in SEL in the context of Vietnamese education.

After having identified the specific skills under the five core SECs and SEL instructional competence within the curricula and compared these skills against the CASEL framework (see sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2), I could compile a comprehensive list of the five core SECs and their associated skills. These core competencies typically include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). However, in the context of Vietnamese EFL teacher education, one additional competence has been added to the framework - SEL

instructional competence along with its key components. This addition was necessary because SEL instructional competence addresses the specific instructional skills that pre-service teachers must develop to integrate SEL into their teaching practices effectively.

Table 10 details the SEL Framework for pre-service EFL teachers, which outlines the five core SECs as well as the five components of SEL instructional competence needed by pre-service EFL teachers to be able to implement SEL in their teaching practices. This framework has been specifically built with a particular focus on the Vietnamese educational context and adapted to the specific needs of pre-service EFL teachers. For example, the item "*SEM6. Manage time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality*" was included in the framework as this skill is found in the curricula and the interviews, where the participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of time-management skill for academic success. This skill was then compared against the CASEL Framework and was found to match the competence of self-management.

Table 10
A Framework of SEL for Pre-service EFL Teachers

Self-Awareness (SEA)
SEA1. Identify and express one's emotions, moods and feelings.
SEA2. Identify and express one's personal interests and needs.
SEA3. Identify one's strengths and limitations.
SEA4. Identify one's personality and values.
SEA5. Demonstrate a sense of self-confidence and optimism.
Self-Management (SEM)
SEM1. Adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations.
SEM2. Set, adapt and evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life.
SEM3. Embrace and overcome challenges in study & life.
SEM4. Resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize my goals.
SEM5. Take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks.
SEM6. Manage time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality.
Social-Awareness (SOA)
SOA1. Identify how others feel and empathize with them.
SOA2. Identify other people's strengths and weaknesses.
SOA3. Understand other points of view and perspectives.
SOA4. Show respect to others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints).
SOA5. Appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities and differences.
Relationship Skills (RES)
RES1. Build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals.
RES2. Identify the purpose, content, means and attitude required for effective communication.
RES3. Work well in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.
RES4. Prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
RES5. Seek or offer help and resources when needed.
Responsible Decision-Making (RDM)
RDM1. Identify & clarify information from various sources to assess the trends and reliability of new ideas.
RDM2. Consider a variety of factors when making decisions.

RDM3. Propose and analyze various solutions and select the most suitable one for problem-solving.
RDM4. Think creatively, create new elements from different ideas and adapt solutions to changing contexts.
RDM5. Anticipate and evaluate the consequences of my words and actions.
SEL Instructional Competence (SELIC)
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy in EFL teaching to support students' social, emotional and academic development.
SELIC 2. Use SEL-related concepts to explicitly address social and emotional issues in teaching practices.
SELIC 3. Model good social emotional competencies.
SELIC 4. Organize activities such as role-playing, group discussion, reflective writing, learning projects, for students to develop and practice SEL skills in authentic EFL teaching contexts.
SELIC 5. Use appropriate tools and methods to assess students' SECs.

Once having been drafted, the framework entered the validation procedure to ensure that it is not only theoretically grounded and contextually relevant but also empirically validated as a reliable tool for assessing pre-service teachers' SEL competencies.

Table 11
Exploratory Factor Analysis Result

Rotated Component Matrixª						
	Component					
	SEM	SOA	RES	SELIC	RDM	SEA
SEA1						.600
SEA2						.727
SEA3						.633
SEA4						.580
SEA5	.590					
SEM1	.664					
SEM2	.699					
SEM3	.684					
SEM4	.716					
SEM5	.696					
SEM6	.546					
SOA1		.657				
SOA2		.739				
SOA3		.667				
SOA4		.688				
SOA5		.636				
RES1			.644			
RES2			.617			
RES3			.672			
RES4			.673			
RES5			.634			
RDM1					.630	
RDM2					.651	
RDM3					.650	
RDM4					.665	
RDM5					.670	
SELIC 1				.726		
SELIC 2				.636		
SELIC 3				.740		
SELIC 4				.689		
SELIC 5				.667		
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis						
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.						
KMO	.887					
Total Variance Explained	Cumulative %: 55.560					

Figure 19
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results
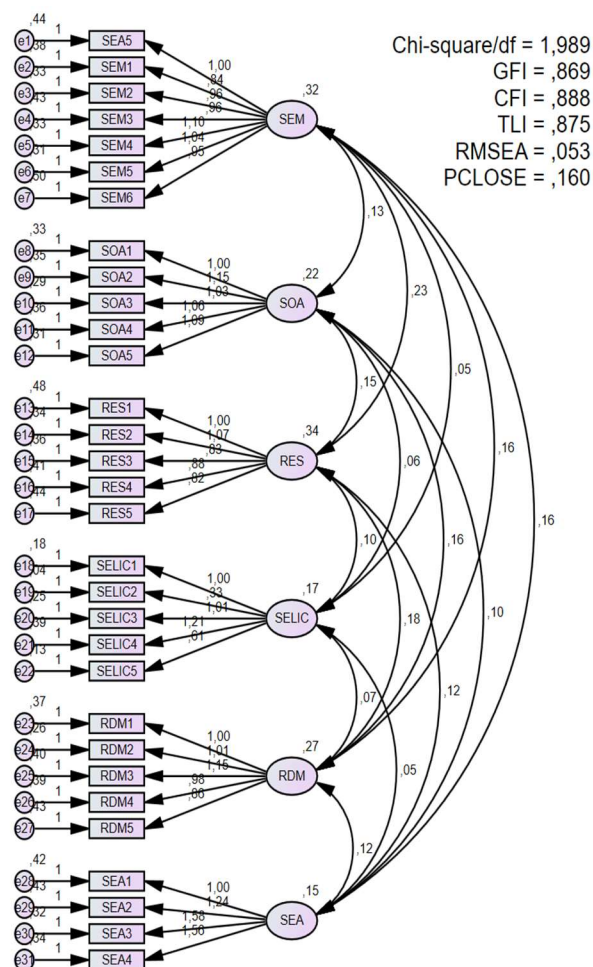
First, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to explore the underlying factor structure of the framework (n = 380). Table 11 shows that EFA results in a clear factor structure aligned with the five core SECs and the five components of SEL instructional

competence. All retained items loaded above the .540 threshold, with most exceeding .650, demonstrating strong item–construct association. These results confirm that the items clustered meaningfully and consistently with the SEL framework developed in Phase 1.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also conducted using AMOS software to confirm the factor structure and assess the fit of the proposed framework against the observed data. The results, as can be seen in Figure 19, confirm that the five core SECs and SELIC are all statistically sound and conceptually distinct, yet interrelated. The Chi-square/df value of 1.989, below the threshold of 3. suggests a good fit; the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = .869), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = .875) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .888) fall within acceptable ranges, indicating that the model adequately represents the data. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .053) demonstrates a close fit with minimal residual error; a PCLOSE value of .160 confirms the adequacy of the model's fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

In summary, document analysis has identified specific SEL skills currently addressed in the curricula, revealing both strength and limitations in terms of SEL coverage. Although SEL elements are present, they remain fragmented, uneven across competences and largely implicit, rather than systematically taught or assessed. This indirect approach to SEL is sufficient to shape pre-service teachers' awareness and positive attitudes, but insufficient to equip them with formal knowledge, structured strategies and assessment tools for intentional SEL integration in EFL teaching, which will be examined in detail later in Chapters 5 and 6. Based on the identified SEL skills, a SEL framework for pre-service EFL teachers has been built and validated. This framework could preserve the core structure of CASEL but became culturally resonant, policy-aligned and pedagogically relevant for Vietnamese EFL teacher education. It subsequently guided instrument development, data analysis and interpretation in Chapters 4–6.

4.2. EFL Teacher Trainers' Perspectives on SEL Training

Studying EFL teacher trainers' perspectives on SEL is necessary because they play an important role in curriculum design, delivery and the modeling of SEL, which directly shapes pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices (Lawlor, 2016). The following analysis, therefore, focuses on EFL teacher trainers' understanding of SEL, their views on the relevance of SEL in EFL instruction, the need to develop SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers, their strategies for fostering these competencies, the barriers they face and possible solutions.

4.2.1. Teacher trainers' understanding of SEL

Data analysis results indicate that although EFL teacher trainers are mostly unfamiliar with the term SEL itself, they are familiar with many of its basic principles. Several

trainers openly admitted their lack of knowledge about the term. For instance, ITT05 candidly stated, *"I'm not familiar with this term specifically. S-E-L? No."* Similarly, ITT03 noted, *"This is the first time I've heard this term; I did not have this topic in mind before."* ITT04 described the concept as *"quite new to me."* These statements indicate a notable gap in the trainers' formal understanding of SEL. This gap does matter because it directly influences how pre-service teachers are exposed to SEL theories and concepts throughout their training.

Despite this unfamiliarity, some trainers recognized elements of SEL in their current teaching practices. ITT04 reflected, *"I think I may have encountered the contents of SEL somewhere."* This statement indicates that although the term is new, its underlying ideas align with trainers' experiences. ITT02 shared a similar experience: *"Naming something like SEL is quite new to me, but the contents are familiar and close to what I know. For example, social relationship skills are clearly reflected in group work activities and I see that group work is very effective in my classes."* Although teacher trainers may not explicitly identify their practices as SEL, they have already intuitively incorporated its principles such as teamwork and social interaction into their training practices.

Notably, some teacher trainers expressed interest in learning more about SEL. ITT05 stated: *"I think it's something that should be talked about more."* This indicates both an acknowledgment of SEL's relevance and a willingness to engage in professional development to transition from intuitive practices to a more formal understanding of SEL, which will enable them to fully integrate it into the teacher training program.

4.2.2. Teacher trainers' advocacy for SEL training in teacher education

Teacher trainers consistently highlighted the relevance of SEL to EFL education, describing it as both a valuable complement to linguistic skills and an essential foundation for students' personal and professional growth. Accordingly, they consistently emphasized the need to integrate SEL into teacher education to foster SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service EFL teachers.

4.2.2.1. SEL as a foundation for a positive learning environment

Teacher trainers view SEL as a foundation for a positive learning environment that benefits both students and teachers. For example, ITT05 noted: *"If I'm in a happy place surrounded by my friends, I'll be a much more effective learner. And if I'm in an uncomfortable place and angry or sad or stressed... Yes, I cannot learn well."* Similarly, ITT02 shared, *"The goal of SEL is to create an environment where students feel comfortable and excited to come to school."* ITT05 reinforced this view: *"I think students who are learning any foreign language can benefit from SECs. When we speak a language that isn't our native language, we have to open ourselves up a lot."* These

statements point out the social and emotional challenges that EFL learners often face and emphasizes the need for teachers to create a safe space where students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes and learning from them.

Language learning has unique social and emotional challenges that distinguish it from other school subjects. ITT05 elaborated, *"It's very difficult to learn another language... You have good days and bad days... I think it is more challenging emotionally."* The emotional ups and downs associated with language learning necessitate SEL integration as it equips students with the tools to regulate their emotions, stay resilient and remain motivated. ITT05 explained, *"If we're able to incorporate these things, it will increase the speed of students learning English... Their proficiency levels will increase much faster."* In other words, SEL can accelerate language proficiency by addressing the social and emotional aspects of the learning process. ITT04 highlighted this benefit: *"SEL will be one of the elements that determine whether a classroom is successful, whether a teacher is successful and whether a student is successful."* This statement reinforces the idea that SEL can create a cycle of success that enhances both teaching and learning outcomes, benefiting both teachers and students.

4.2.2.2. The interconnection between cognitive and non-cognitive factors

Teacher trainers also emphasized the need for a more balanced approach to education, which integrates both cognitive (academic) and non-cognitive (e.g. social and emotional) factors. ITT04 highlighted that both aspects are equally important for a learner's overall success: *"I don't think one factor is more important than the others because I believe each has its own role in a student's success."* This holistic approach not only enhances academic success but also fosters student happiness and fulfillment. ITT04 explained, *"I think student success must first come from their happiness in learning."* The integration of non-cognitive skills such as SECs can help students feel more engaged and motivated in their learning, and this contributes to their overall well-being and academic success.

Focusing solely on academic outcomes can lead to disengagement and lack of enthusiasm for learning. ITT04 warned: *"If we overly prioritize academic outcomes, students may gain knowledge, but they may not develop positive attitudes or a love for learning."* With similar concern, ITT02 pointed out the need for a balance between academic knowledge and SECs: *"Cognitive knowledge is only part of it. During the learning process, we also need social skills and self-management."* The trainers also emphasized that integrating SEL early in education brings long-term benefits: *"If we can teach these skills at the beginning, it will help in the future"* [ITT05]. Another trainer referenced a very popular Vietnamese proverb to connect SEL with Vietnamese traditional values: *"In Vietnamese culture, we have the saying "Tiên học lễ, hậu học văn"*

(First learn propriety, then learn knowledge)" [ITT03]. This saying emphasizes that SEL aligns with deeply-rooted cultural and educational values of Vietnam.

The connection between cognitive and non-cognitive factors can significantly reduce the teacher's workload. ITT04 explained, *"When students fully develop these competencies, their ability to self-regulate improves and they will take responsibility for their own learning, and this will reduce the teacher's burden."* In contrast, students who lack SECs tend to disengage from learning. ITT04 noted, *"Students with limited social emotional skills typically do not achieve high academic results and are reluctant to take risks in learning tasks."* Therefore, teacher trainers advocate for integrating both cognitive and non-cognitive factors to create a more effective and balanced learning environment.

4.2.2.3. SEL as a teaching approach

SEL is viewed by EFL teacher trainers as an approach to teaching rather than just a separate program, subject, lesson or activity. ITT05 stressed this view: *"I would see it (SEL) more as an approach to which we can look at our teaching and learning."* This perspective suggests that SEL should guide how every lesson is planned and delivered. Looking to the future, another trainer emphasized SEL's growing importance in a rapidly changing world. As traditional knowledge becomes more accessible through technology, in-person education will need to focus more on students' social and emotional skills: *"I believe SEL will become a teaching approach, especially in a rapidly developing society like ours... students can easily get access to knowledge with the rapid development of IT, but they need practical skills to do so, and SEL can help this process"* [ITT04].

4.2.2.4. SEL's relevance across all subjects

EFL teacher trainers stressed that SEL is relevant across all subjects. ITT04 emphasized, *"I don't think English is the only subject that can fit with SEL. I believe that all subjects are suitable for integrating SEL. Teaching any subject must consider the social and emotional factors of the learners."* ITT05 reinforced this view: *"Whenever we have students work together in pairs or groups, all of these skills will be happening at the same time. So I think in any subject, you have to have SECs"* [ITT05]. These statements highlight the importance of integrating SEL into every subject to support comprehensive student development. However, trainers noted that English and social sciences may provide more opportunities for SEL as they naturally focus on communication and cultural understanding: *"English or language subjects as well as social sciences, offer more space for us to explore and develop these competencies compared to technical or natural science subjects"* [ITT04]. Moreover, EFL teachers, according to teacher trainers, have more favorable conditions to integrate SEL into lessons, especially when discussing cultural and social topics. ITT01 noted, *"In lessons that may involve cultural and social knowledge, we can also integrate these social emotional elements."*

4.2.2.5. The need to integrate SEL into EFL teacher education

EFL teacher trainers emphasized that educators are not just conveyors of knowledge but also caretakers of students' holistic growth. ITT05 stated: *"I think it is part of a teacher's responsibility to instruct students how to behave with one another... Maybe they have some negative social, emotional attributes that I can help with as a teacher."* This statement reflects their commitment to addressing students' social-emotional needs. Trainers also emphasized their role in equipping pre-service teachers with essential SECs to help them handle challenges they may face in their future life and work. ITT05 explained, *"Inside the classroom, we can try to create a safe and happy environment for our pre-service teachers. And hopefully, what we teach them, they're able to use outside of the classroom in the future too."* ITT04 regarded teachers as *"a companion, someone who walks alongside, designs and helps construct these SECs for the learner."* This comment, again, emphasizes that teachers needs to mentor and guide students through different stages of their social and emotional development.

Teacher trainers consistently advocated for the development of SECs and SEL instructional competence in pre-service EFL teachers. They emphasized that these competencies are essential for pre-service teachers to address the social-emotional challenges of modern classrooms. ITT05 noted, *"There are always some students who are... it's hard to get them involved... There's bullying all over the world... You have to manage all of the social issues between people and groups."* Trainers further highlighted the reciprocal relationship between teachers' emotional states and their students' learning experiences: *"If our lessons aren't positive, it will definitely affect the learner's emotions and their emotions will surely affect their learning outcomes"* [ITT02].

Teacher trainers consistently argued that pre-service teachers' own SECs are foundational to their success as teachers. ITT01 stated: *"If they cannot manage stress, regulate their emotions or communicate well, how can they manage a class of fifty students?"* They also believed that equipping pre-service teachers with SECs enables them to model and pass these skills on to their students: *"If they are emotionally, socially competent, they will teach their students the same skills and it just multiplies"* [ITT05]. Teacher trainers also stress that the five SECs are equally important for pre-service teachers. According to one trainer, *"I don't think one competence is more important than the other because each one forms part of the whole. If pre-service teachers focus only on building relationships without self-awareness, their voice won't be strong* [ITT04]. This holistic view reflects the interconnectedness of SECs and the need to foster all of them for pre-service teachers.

Although teacher trainers advocated for a balanced integration of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, they acknowledged significant gaps in SEL training within the EFL teacher education program. ITT05 reflected, *"They need sufficient training in this area. I graduated my master's and I heard about this topic... not very in depth."* Without proper training, many pre-service teachers feel underprepared to implement SEL in their teaching. In addition, trainers argue that SEL training should not end with initial teacher education but should continue throughout the teaching career. *"Every teacher should have more training in SEL, even teachers who have been teaching for 20 years"* [ITT05]. This continuous professional development is seen as essential for keeping teachers continuously updated to address the evolving challenges of modern classrooms.

Despite acknowledging the importance of SECs and SEL instructional competence, the trainers were concerned that the current program does not sufficiently address them. ITT01 admitted: *"We mention them in our courses, but SEL is not a clear objective. It appears here and there."* This reflection suggests that although trainers recognize the need, formal opportunities for SEL remain limited or implicit in the curriculum. This inconsistency may explain why pre-service teachers' perceptions of SEL often appear fragmented, and why their practices tend to be intuitive.

4.2.3. Teacher trainers' approaches to SEL implementation

The analysis of interviews with EFL teacher trainers uncovers several strategies that they use to integrate SEL into the program. These strategies include incorporating SEL into existing curricula; modeling SECs; incorporating SEL criteria into assessments; using group work, social media and extracurricular activities; enhancing continuous observation and continuous professional development.

4.1.5.1. Integrating SEL naturally and implicitly into existing courses

Trainers emphasized that SEL-related skills have already been embedded naturally and implicitly in existing courses of the curriculum. ITT05 explained: *"I think we naturally incorporate SEL skills into our lessons because if we create a group of students and they don't have any of these skills, then it will be a disaster."* ITT05 acknowledged that although SECs are not always explicitly named, they are often developed through classroom management, collaboration and reflective practices: *"Even if we don't think about SECs, we're still teaching them."* ITT05 elaborated: *"We can teach SECs passively by doing group work, seeing how students interact with each other."* This passive approach ensures SECs are integrated naturally alongside academic content without requiring additional time or resources.

Another trainer stated: *"I do not organize it as a separate activity, but integrate it into group activities during my lessons" [ITT01]*. However, this strategy also raises concerns about fragmentation and lack of focus. Pre-service teachers may engage in SEL-related tasks without fully recognizing them as SEL, which may limit their conceptual understanding and affect how they later apply SEL in practice.

4.1.5.2. Modeling SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers

Another strategy is modeling SEL for pre-service teachers. When teacher trainers demonstrate SEL competencies, they set vivid and authentic examples for pre-service teachers to follow. ITT03 emphasized this role: *"In Vietnamese culture, there's a saying 'Thầy nào trò ấy' (like teacher, like student).' Teachers, with their accumulated experience and knowledge, inevitably influence their students"* [ITT03]. This highlights the importance of teacher trainers acting as role models, demonstrating SECs and SEL instructional competence so that their pre-service teachers can master these competencies, and then carry them into their own future teaching careers.

Teacher trainers do not explicitly state that they are teaching SECs, but their actions naturally convey these competencies and they assume pre-service teachers will absorb them. ITT05 explained, *"I don't think I have explicitly told my pre-service teachers this... but just lead by example and hopefully, if they think I'm a good teacher, they will take the parts of me that they like and use them"* [ITT05]. In the same vein, ITT03 reflected: *"I try to show patience, empathy and responsibility when I work with students. I believe they learn more from observing me than from lectures."* However, although modeling is powerful, it is often implicit and uneven across trainers, leaving pre-service teachers with different levels of exposure to SEL, leading to fragmented understanding and inconsistent practices.

4.1.5.3. Incorporating SEL criteria into assessments

Another strategy is the inclusion of SEL-related criteria in student assessments. If elements like emotional expression, interaction and body language are assessed, pre-service teachers will focus more on these elements. ITT02 explained, *"When designing learning activities, I include social-emotional criteria in the rubric. Previously, the focus was on academic skills, but now interaction and body language are also assessed, so pre-service teachers are pushed to work on these areas."* ITT02 observed that after introducing SEL criteria, *"pre-service teachers began making more effort in group activities and leadership. They now focus more on how they work with others, not just on showing knowledge."* In other words, when SEL elements are put into assessments, pre-service teachers become more committed to developing SEL skills, and then SEL naturally becomes an integral part of the learning process. However, trainers acknowledged that this type of assessment is still informal, often dependent on individual preferences rather than institutional policy, leading to inconsistent outcomes.

4.1.5.4. Using group work and digital platforms

Group work is often used to foster SECs for pre-service teachers as it can provide a natural platform to develop social and emotional skills . ITT05 remarked, *"Whenever we have pre-service teachers work together in pairs or groups, all of these skills will be working and developing at the same time."* Another trainer, ITT02, emphasized that group activities can enhance the development of all SECs: *"Group work activities, in the classes I teach, are very effective. It doesn't just build social skills but develops all of the SEL skills."* In large classrooms, ITT02 emphasized the effectiveness of group work in increasing pre-service teachers' participation: *"I've tried to address this by having pre-service teachers do more group work, especially learning projects."* In this case, project-based learning is believed to promote active participation, empathy, responsible decision-making and relationship skills.

Besides group work, digital platforms are also utilized to provide an alternative avenue for personalized and interactive learning experiences. ITT02 explained, *"I also create activities that encourage them to interact on social media to provide more opportunities for them to express their strengths and weaknesses."* Actually, the use of social media can enhance engagement and interactions as they can provide flexible platforms for all pre-service teachers of different learning styles to participate and develop their SECs. In short, the combination of group work and digital platforms helps teacher trainers create a diverse and inclusive learning environment, where pre-service teachers can build the necessary social-emotional skills. However, the trainers also pointed out problems such as unequal participation in group work and superficial interactions on digital platforms, suggesting the need for closer monitoring and guidance.

4.1.5.5. Using extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities can also promote the development of SECs in authentic environments. ITT04 emphasized this view: *"In addition to the formal content in the training program, we also have a lot of activities such as cultural events, contests, competitions, sports, community and volunteer work, which contribute to the development of these competencies."* ITT04 elaborated: *"Our pre-service teachers join these activities as volunteers and accompany us to schools to help organize these activities."* These activities provide them with opportunities to activate, practice and develop essential SECs, including social interaction and emotional regulation. ITT05 reinforced this: *"The university is doing a good job of having clubs and events available to pre-service teachers so that they feel like more of a community together."* However, participation is voluntary, and not all students engage equally, creating variability in SEL training opportunities.

4.1.5.6. Continuous professional development

Continuous professional development plays an important role in preparing teachers for the complex realities of the classroom. EFL teacher trainers emphasized that although initial pre-service teacher training provides a firm foundation, much of the real learning happens through practical experience. ITT05 stated: *"I don't think any teacher who is starting is ever prepared enough... they can learn a lot by doing... they won't fully learn these skills until they have their own class and they're on their own."* Micro-teaching and practicum can offer early exposure, but true professional development occurs when teachers manage their own classrooms, face and address challenges independently and then reflect on their experience: *"The best way to learn these skills is just from doing it and encountering the challenges... being self-aware of their success and failures"* [ITT05]. This ongoing process of doing and learning from experience is one of the best ways of fostering SECs and SEL instructional competence.

In summary, the interviews with teacher trainers reveal a diverse range of strategies aimed at fostering SECs and SEL instructional competence in pre-service teachers. These strategies include group work, hands-on teaching experiences, extracurricular activities and ongoing reflective practices. Although most of these strategies do not explicitly target SEL, together they could partially prepare future teachers for the social-emotional dimensions of their teaching profession. However, without explicit instruction, they remain implicit and inconsistent, leaving pre-service teachers with fragmented understanding and intuitive practices of SEL.

4.2.4. Teacher trainers' views on the barriers to SEL and possible solutions

EFL teacher trainers identified multiple barriers that may hinder the effective integration of SEL into their training practices, including limited trainer expertise, overloaded content, time and resource constraints and psychological resistance. However, they also proposed solutions, including professional development, resource development and strategic integration, highlighting a commitment to advance SEL despite constraints.

4.2.5.1. Teacher trainers' views on the barriers to SEL

A frequently cited barrier is the limited official guidelines, training and professional development for teacher trainers themselves in SEL. As one trainer reflected, *"As a younger teacher in the past, I think this was a huge challenge for me. Why is this student not learning? Why is this student more focused on something else instead of me?"* [ITT05]. Without proper professional development opportunities, teacher trainers often neglect or fail to teach and model SEL for pre-service teachers. In addition, without formal knowledge or language, explicit learning outcomes, frameworks or assessment criteria, trainers tend to rely on their own personal initiative, teaching experience and beliefs rather than systematic approaches, resulting in inconsistent implementation.

Teacher trainers also reported challenges in balancing the need to teach academic content and the desire to foster pre-service teachers' SECs. Time constraints and large class sizes often make it difficult for teacher trainers to prioritize both. ITT05 elaborated on this difficulty: *"I think the biggest difficulty would be balancing time... You want them to develop these competencies... but we have limited classroom time" [ITT05]*. Therefore, despite SEL's importance, academic goals tend to take precedence, and there is little space for explicit SEL instruction. ITT01 also noted that SEL is often secondary: *"Academic requirements are the first priority... SEL remains secondary"* [ITT01].

Another obstacle is the resistance to new methods or extra responsibilities. Some instructors resist SEL due to concerns about increased workload and additional responsibilities. ITT04 explained, *"Psychological resistance of teacher trainers is also a problem; they see it as adding to their burdens"* [ITT04]. Some instructors would not view SEL as an integral part of the training process; instead, they misunderstood SEL as an extra task or burden, and this misconception may hinder its adoption. ITT01 also noted that some teacher trainers may view their primary role as focusing on academic content: *"At the start, teacher trainers might see this as adding more work... their main task is to teach the subject matter, not to focus on SECs"* [ITT01].

Limited resources, both human and financial, may also hinder SEL implementation. ITT04 emphasized the importance of institutional support: *"We need to consider the resources required to successfully implement this model" [ITT04]*. Without proper funding, it is difficult to develop SEL-specific materials, hire trained professionals or provide ongoing training. Meanwhile, large class sizes make it difficult for teacher trainers to address individual pre-service teachers' social and emotional needs. ITT02 highlighted this issue: *"In a class of 45 pre-service teachers, I can't check on their emotions individually."* With limited time and resources, many pre-service teachers may not receive the emotional support they need, especially in large classes, where personalized attention is nearly impossible.

Finally, teacher trainers reported a lack of support or guidelines from the broader educational system as a significant barrier to SEL integration. ITT04 pointed out, *"Implementing SEL requires not only the willingness of individual teacher trainers but also the support of the institution"* [ITT04]. Due to insufficient institutional backing, even highly motivated trainers may fail to implement SEL effectively as systemic change requires policy support, resources and structural adjustments to ensure sustainability.

In summary, the integration of SEL into teacher education faces significant barriers, including insufficient professional development for trainers, time constraints, trainers' resistance, resource limitations, large class sizes and lack of institutional support. To overcome these challenges, there must be a comprehensive approach that includes strategic professional development, resource allocation and strong institutional support.

4.2.5.2 Recommendations for promoting SEL in teacher education

During the interviews, EFL teacher trainers made several recommendations to enhance SEL integration into EFL teacher education programs. These recommendations focus on raising awareness among both trainers and pre-service teachers, enhancing stakeholder involvement, and implementing explicit SEL instruction.

Firstly, teacher trainers highlighted the importance of workshops or training courses to enhance perceptions about SEL: *"It is necessary to change instructors' perceptions through workshops, training courses or even peer learning" [ITT04]*. These professional development opportunities not only provide the knowledge needed to understand SEL but also demonstrate its practical benefits. However, the active engagement from pre-service teachers themselves is equally important. As one trainer emphasized: *"The pre-service teachers themselves must be very proactive and must also recognize that developing these competencies is very important"* [ITT04]. This statement emphasizes the idea that pre-service teachers must take ownership of their learning and actively participate in the process of building their SECs and SEL instructional competence.

Trainers also stressed that the successful SEL implementation requires collaboration among various stakeholders. ITT05 emphasized that although teacher trainers play a significant role in SEL, they should not be solely responsible for the development of pre-service teachers' SECs: *"I don't think we can say only teachers. I think teachers are a big factor in this. Hopefully, their parents are helping... but maybe the third party would be a school counselor or a psychologist... I think it would take a team"* [ITT05]. Similarly, ITT02 suggested that SEL must be part of a system-wide strategy: *"This isn't something that should fall on teachers alone but should be a collective effort involving the entire educational community."* This collective effort would allow SEL to move from implicit, individualised acts to an explicit, program-wide priority.

ITT03 further highlighted the importance of the broader environment in SEL development: *"The environment where pre-service teachers practice and learn, such as schools and society, plays an essential role in developing their SECs."* This emphasizes that SEL is not confined to the classroom but is also shaped by the community and social context in which pre-service teachers live and learn. ITT04 reinforced the idea of shared responsibility: *"I think many parties should be involved in the SECs of pre-service teachers... Trainers, family members and even the broader community all have roles to play"* [ITT04]. This view changes the teacher trainer's role to that of a facilitator or companion in the SEL process, rather than the sole bearer of responsibility.

Finally, they advocated for explicit and dedicated instruction in SEL. Despite the natural presence of SEL in the curriculum, trainers noted that these competencies are not always adequately and explicitly highlighted. ITT04 reflected: *"It's unfortunate that these*

elements are not clearly named or presented in the training program." This implicit nature of SEL can lead to these competencies being undervalued, and limit their visibility as well as perceived importance in the curriculum. Therefore, ITT04 recommended explicitly outlining SEL objectives in the curriculum to enhance the engagement of both teacher trainers and pre-service teachers: *"If we clearly outline these skills in the curriculum, it would help teacher trainers and pre-service teachers focus on them more. It can shape many of the activities in the training process."*

ITT05 suggested that SEL can complement academic goals without detracting from them: *"As long as it doesn't take away from the learning objectives already established, incorporating these SECs into the curriculum, I think, is just a bonus."* ITT04 added, *"At the university level, it might not be necessary to name these competencies explicitly, but it's essential to ensure that these competencies are actively fostered and developed."* This flexibility indicates that SEL does not necessarily dominate the curriculum, but it should be more intentionally integrated to ensure effective implementation.

ITT02 also advocated for this explicit approach: *"We still hope there will be a dedicated course for pre-service teachers to understand and develop these skills."* The concern is that without explicit instruction, pre-service teachers might fail to recognize and learn these skills. ITT02 explained: *"If they are only integrated implicitly, pre-service teachers may not be able to envision how to achieve these skills,"* highlighting the importance of targeted training opportunities where SEL can be integrated more explicitly and intentionally. By contrast, ITT01 suggested that even short-term workshops or dedicated sessions could provide valuable opportunities for SEL: *"It would be great if we had a dedicated session, not necessarily a full course, but perhaps a workshop on how to better integrate SEL into teaching."* This indicates that although a full course may not always be feasible, short targeted sessions can still enhance pre-service teachers' ability to incorporate SEL into their teaching practices.

It can be seen that the interviewed EFL teacher trainers are very enthusiastic about SEL. Although they have limited formal knowledge of SEL, they are familiar with its basic principles and skills. They also recognize its relevance in EFL teaching, learning and teacher education. Their strong advocacy for developing SECs and SEL instructional competence in pre-service teachers reflects their commitment to preparing well-rounded EFL teachers who can foster both linguistic and social-emotional skills in their students. Despite perceived barriers to SEL, they shared various strategies to integrate SEL into their courses. These findings could partly explain why SEL training at VPU remains implicit and inconsistent, contributing to pre-service teachers' positive attitudes but fragmented understanding and intuitive practices.

4.3. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in SEL

This section evaluates the training of pre-service teachers in SECs and SEL instructional competence, presenting both the overall evaluation of training and the strategies or opportunities for fostering these competencies within the program.

4.3.1 Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in Social Emotional Competencies

Multiple data sources highlight the overemphasis on language proficiency, lack of explicit emphasis on SECs and varied emphasis given to different SECs. Focus group interview with pre-service teachers highlights a notable gap in the current curriculum, which places heavy emphasis on language proficiency over fostering SECs. FIPT03 noted, *"The program seems to focus a lot on English practice, emphasizing performance and external aspects rather than inner values."* ITT04 also noted that *"teacher trainers seem to focus on knowledge and teaching skills without much focus on SECs."* Many pre-service teachers expressed a desire for a more holistic training: *"I hope the program emphasizes the development of these skills for us"* [FIPT01].

Curriculum analysis also reveals a varied emphasis on SECs within the EFL teacher education curriculum (see Figure 20). Self-management (SEM) received the highest focus with 82 mentions. Relationship skills (RES) follow closely with 71 mentions. Responsible decision-making (RDM) is also covered with 43 mentions. In contrast, social awareness (SOA) and self-awareness (SEA) receive much fewer mentions (31 and 11, respectively). This uneven emphasis suggests that although the curriculum addresses all the five core SECs, it needs to focus more on social awareness and self-awareness to ensure holistic development for pre-service teachers.

Figure 20

Varied Level of Emphasis on Different SECs
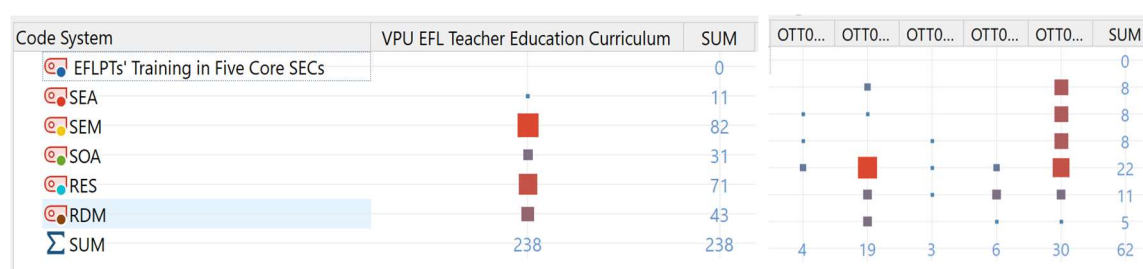
Classroom observations also reveal a noticeable disparity in how different observed teacher trainers (OTT01-05) integrated the training of SECs for pre-service teachers (see Figure 20). OTT05 stood out with 30 references to SECs training. OTT02 also places a noticeable emphasis on SECs with 18 references. However, other trainers, such as OTT03 (3 references), OTT01 (4 references) and OTT0 4 (6 references) have far fewer instances of these competencies. This gap aligns with feedback from the focus group

interview, where pre-service teachers reported a significant dependence on individual instructors in SECs training. For example, FIPT01 noted: *"It depends on the instructor, whether they truly focus on SECs or not."* FIPT10 also stressed the variations in how SECs are addressed across different instructors: *"... but not every lecturer can teach them."* These responses indicate that training in SECs largely depend son the instructors, which results in inconsistent training opportunities for pre-service teachers.

Table 12

Specific Strategies for Training SECs in Pre-service EFL Teachers

Core SECs	Training Strategies Used
Self-Awareness (SEA)	- Emotional awareness activities (*"How are you feeling today?"*). - Personalized feedback on strengths and weaknesses. - Reflective goal-setting and teaching experiences. - Discussions on personality traits and values.
Self-Management (SEM)	- Emotional regulation through videos and reflection. - Goal setting and structured weekly plans. - Time management exercises (e.g., addressing distractions). - Self-monitoring during group activities.
Social Awareness (SOA)	- Empathy-building scenarios and peer support. - Pairing students for mutual appreciation. - Active listening exercises. - Diversity-focused projects (*"Cultures of English-Speaking Countries"*).
Relationship Skills (RES)	- Group work for collaboration and conflict management. - Seating arrangements fostering connections. - Debates and feedback sessions to refine communication. - Peer support within groups.
Responsible Decision-Making (RDM)	- Real-life scenarios and debates for critical thinking. - Credible information gathering and cross-checking. - Group projects simulating decision-making. - Adaptability in challenging situations.

Table 12 outlines the specific strategies or opportunities for fostering SECs. These opportunities reflect an encouraging attempt to embed SECs in reflective, interactive and experiential activities. They provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to enhance SECs while also linking SECs to language learning tasks. However, they also reveal significant inconsistencies and limitations. Many strategies are implemented inconsistently across teacher trainers, depending on their personal preferences and teaching styles, which makes SECs training uneven, inconsistent, implicit and incidental. For example, empathy or decision-making is fostered through group work and debates but rarely articulated explicitly as SECs. This implicitness means pre-service teachers may engage in these activities without recognizing their development in SECs, leading to fragmented understandings and intuitive practices.

The questionnaire analysis results as shown in Table 13 further supports the above qualitative findings. The descriptive statistics indicate that training in SECs is moderately positive, with mean scores across all SECs ranging from 3.496 to 3.731 on a scale of 1 to 5, and all were significantly higher than the neutral midpoint of 3 (all p < .001), indicating that pre-service teachers felt they had received some degree of SEL-related preparation. They reported feeling most well-trained in relationship skills

(M=3.731), meanwhile self-management received a lower mean score of 3.496, suggesting more limited or less explicit attention to this competence during training. The other SECs have similar mean scores of around 3.60.

Table 13.
Descriptive Statistics of Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in SECs

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t(df)	p	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Self-awareness	1.00	5.00	3.624	0.697	0.624	16.783	< .001	0.551 – 0.697
Self-management	1.00	5.00	3.496	0.699	0.496	13.282	< .001	0.422 – 0.569
Social awareness	1.00	5.00	3.606	0.720	0.606	15.772	< .001	0.530 – 0.681
Relationship skills	1.40	5.00	3.731	0.697	0.730	19.633	< .001	0.657 – 0.804
Responsible decision-making	1.40	5.00	3.610	0.695	0.610	16.453	< .001	0.537 – 0.683
N=351; Test value = 3 = Neutral Midpoint; df=350								

In summary, all the data sources indicate that although all the five core SECs are addressed within the training program, the depth and explicitness of training vary significantly across competences, trainers and pre-service teachers. As a result, pre-service teachers perceive SEL positively yet superficially, and practice it in a fragmented and intuitive manner. Teacher education programs, therefore, should ensure more explicit, balanced and assessable training across all five SECs so that pre-service teachers can not only experience SEL during their pre-service training but also consciously embed it into their professional teaching practices.

4.3.2. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in SEL Instructional Competence

This section moves from training in SECs to focus on SEL instructional competence, analyzing how they are prepared to apply pedagogical principles, use explicit SEL concepts, model SECs, design classroom activities, and assess students' SECs. The interviews with teacher trainers reveal a general consensus that although components of SEL instructional competence are present within the program, their level of integration is still moderate. One trainer explained, *"I think at present, these elements have been moderately integrated into the program"* [ITT02]. Another trainer remarked, *"It's still a relatively new model in Vietnam and we don't yet have enough time or preparation to fully integrate it into teaching practices"* [ITT01].

SEL instructional competence is often incorporated within existing courses such as practical pedagogy but lacks a distinct or explicit emphasis. As one trainer remarked:*"SEL elements may be included in the program, but I have yet to see them clearly in real teaching practices"* [ITT01]. She continued:*"I think it is not clearly defined as a separate course but integrated into subjects like Pedagogical Practice"* [ITT01]. In this approach, SEL instructional competence may be overshadowed by other curriculum content, which may limit its visibility and impact on pre-service teachers.

The trainers' remarks highlight two important challenges: the novelty of SEL as a framework in Vietnam and the lack of adequate time and preparation for pre-service EFL teachers to fully integrate SEL into their training practices. Addressing this gap requires a continual review and enhancement of the curriculum to ensure SEL elements are not only taught but practiced. One trainer emphasized the importance of ongoing curriculum updates: *"In the future, we will need to review and compare our training program with other programs to incorporate more of these competencies"* [ITT04].

The quantitative analysis of pre-service teachers' training in SEL instructional competence provides statistical support for the qualitative findings discussed above (see Table 14). Pre-service teachers reported higher mean scores in SELIC1_Applying foundational psychological and pedagogical principles (3.82) and SELIC3_Modeling SECs in teaching practices (3.60). SELIC4_Organizing activities to foster SECs also received a relatively high score (3.48). However, they reported lower mean scores in SELIC2_Applying explicit SEL concepts (3.06) and SELIC5_Assessing students' SECs (2.94). These quantitative findings align with the qualitative findings discussed above.

Curriculum analysis supports this unbalanced training across the five components of SEL instructional competence (see Figure 18). The curriculum prioritizes *"Apply knowledge of psychology & pedagogy"* (57 references) and *"Model SECs in EFL teaching"* (44 references). *"Organize activities to foster SECs"* is moderately emphasized (23 references). However, *"Explicitly use SEL concepts"* and *"Assess students' SECs"* are minimally addressed (3 references each), revealing gaps in these areas.

Table 14

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Training in SEL Instructional Competence (SELIC)

Components of SELIC	Strategies by Teacher Trainers
SELIC 1. Apply psychology & pedagogy (Mean=3.82; SD=.807)	- Delivered psychology & pedagogy courses to provide theoretical grounding [ITT02, 04] - Modeled grouping techniques & lesson planning to ensure inclusivity & reduce anxiety [OTT01]. - Facilitated peer evaluations of teaching techniques & teaching simulations [OTT04]. - Used pedagogical situations; groups acted out problems & proposed solutions [OTT02].
SELIC 2. Use SEL concepts explicitly (Mean=3.06; SD=.443)	- Reminded pre-service teachers that teaching should create supportive environments; emphasized attending to students' emotions, engagement & conflict resolution [OTT04]. - Assigned "Dream School" and "Happy Class" activities requiring pre-service teachers to brainstorm and visualize ideal SEL classrooms [OTT02]. - Occasionally commented on reducing anxiety or boosting confidence, but lacked explicit SEL training [OTT01; OTT04].
SELIC 3. Model good SECs in EFL Teaching (Mean=3.60; SD=.651)	- Used classroom scenarios to train pre-service teachers in handling problems [OTT01]. - Encouraged pre-service teachers to reflect on their own emotions and regulate reactions during teaching [OTT04]. - Required pre-service teachers to involve students, show enthusiasm, use supportive feedback, and create welcoming classrooms [ITT02; OTT02]. - Demonstrated empathy, patience, respect in classroom management [OTT01; OTT04].

SELIC 4. Organize activities to foster SECs for students (Mean=3.48; SD=.641)	- Encouraged pre-service teachers to design warm-ups such as "Find Someone Who" and brainstorming to promote teamwork [OTT04]. - Recommended posters, games, quizzes & technology to create engaging lessons [OTT02] - Trained pre-service teachers to use group work and debates to build empathy, respect, and critical thinking [OTT02; OTT05]. - Asked reflective questions to guide lesson design, e.g., *"How can I make this lesson engaging? How can I connect the students?"* [OTT04].
SELIC 5.Assess students' SECs	(Mean =2.94; SD=.286) Almost no explicit training observed; no tools or methods introduced.

Table 14 summarizes how each component of SEL instructional competence is trained. In general teacher trainers employed a variety of strategies, ranging from scenario-based learning to reflective practices and creative projects, to build pre-service teachers' SEL instructional competence. However, the approaches were often implicit, incidental and inconsistent. As a result, pre-service teachers often develop only a fragmented understanding of SEL, practice it unevenly and intuitively, and then enter future classrooms without the confidence or tools to design, implement and evaluate SEL in a deliberate and comprehensive way. To address this fragmented training, future program reforms should make SEL explicit in course outcomes, intentional in trainer modeling, central in activity design, and visible in assessment rubrics.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the SEL training context within the English language teacher education program. Although SEL is embedded in the curricula, it is largely implicit, fragmented and unevenly enacted across competencies, pre-service teachers and trainers. SEL-related skills appear in the form of communicative tasks, group work, reflective activities or practicum guidelines, yet they are seldom addressed explicitly as SEL or scaffolded through structured instruction. As a result, pre-service teachers experience SEL more through implicit modelling, individual lecturer commitment, personal inclination and incidental learning opportunities rather than intentional training. This context could explain many of the patterns observed in Chapter 5, for example students' generally positive but limited and fragmented perceptions of SEL, and in Chapter 6, for example their tendency to practise SEL implicitly and intuitively rather than intentionally.

CHAPTER 5: PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

This chapter moves focus from training context to perceptions, or how pre-service EFL teachers perceive SEL and its relevance to EFL teaching. The section begins with an analysis of pre-service teachers' awareness and understanding of SEL, followed by their perceptions on the benefits of SEL integration. It also discusses pre-service teachers' view on the role of EFL teachers in promoting SEL and their need for training in SECs and SEL instructional competence. Finally, it discusses their perceived preparedness to implement SEL, the barriers they encounter and any support they need.

5.1. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Understanding of Social Emotional Learning

This section investigates pre-service EFL teachers' familiarity with SEL concepts, their interpretations of the term SEL and their understanding of the five core SECs. It also explores the priority they place on different SECs and the relationships among them.

5.1.1. Familiarity with the concepts of Social Emotional Learning

Familiarity with SEL is an important step in exploring perceptions because familiarity lays the foundation for how pre-service EFL teachers understand, interpret and value SEL. The focus group interview reveals that pre-service teachers have varying degrees of familiarity with SEL, ranging from initial complete unfamiliarity to a gradual recognition of its elements in their existing coursework.

5.1.1.1. Limited initial familiarity with SEL

Many pre-service EFL teachers expressed a lack of familiarity with SEL as a formal concept. FIPT10 candidly admitted: *"We didn't know anything about this SEL model"*. This view was reinforced by other pre-service teachers. For example, FIPT07 stated, *"This is the first time."* FIPT06 similarly noted, *"This is the first time I've seen this term"*. These responses indicate that SEL had not been a concept previously introduced in their teacher education program. FIPT09 added, *"I'm not clear about this model. I don't know what it involves"*. This comment reinforces the concern that there remains some confusion or lack of clarity about what SEL truly means. This unfamiliarity with SEL among pre-service EFL teachers reveals a notable gap in the integration of SEL concepts or theories within their training, which could limit their ability to effectively incorporate SEL into their own teaching practices.

5.1.1.2. Gradual recognition of SEL elements in existing courses

Despite their initial unfamiliarity with SEL as a formal concept, after some discussion in the focus group interview, some pre-service teachers began to recognize SEL elements

in their coursework. FIPT06 reflected on this realization: *"I suddenly realize that all these elements are present in teaching methods courses"*. This recognition suggests that although the term "SEL" is new to them, its related principles are already present in their coursework, though not explicitly labeled as SEL. FIPT06 further elaborated: *"I now realize that in the English language teaching methodology course, SEL elements are quite clear. We have various teaching methods and now we see which method suits us and which methods and processes are appropriate for students – social awareness must be there"*. This acknowledgment reflects a growing awareness among pre-service EFL teachers that although SEL is not explicitly taught, its components have already been integrated into their courses.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers initially had limited familiarity with the concept of SEL, but they gradually recognized its principles embedded in their coursework. This pattern reflects both the implicit presence of SEL in the curriculum and the lack of explicit instruction and formal introduction by instructors in classroom. This lack of explicit integration creates gaps in pre-service teachers' conceptual understanding and hinder the effective application of SEL in their teaching practices. To address this, teacher education programs should consider more explicit integration of SEL into their curricula. This could include dedicated courses or modules that clearly define SEL and practical strategies for application in the classroom.

5.1.2. Interpretations of the term Social Emotional Learning

This section investigates how pre-service EFL teachers interpreted SEL. The interview reveals a range of interpretations, with pre-service teachers emphasizing different aspects of SEL. The questionnaire data further supports this analysis, measuring how accurately the pre-service teachers can define SEL. Firstly, the focus group interview with pre-service teachers reveals diverse interpretations of SEL. They emphasized different aspects of the concept. Some recognized SEL as essential for addressing the social and emotional dimensions of learning; some viewed SEL as a valuable tool for developing life skills; others focused on the broader societal implications of SEL.

5.1.2.1. Recognition of social and emotional aspects of learning

Several pre-service EFL teachers acknowledged the focus of SEL on both emotions and social interactions. FIPT08 remarked, *"SEL means learning based on emotions and communication with others."* This statement highlights how SEL integrates emotional regulation and interpersonal skills in the learning process. Similarly, FIPT09 noted, *"This model involves learning related to emotions and the surrounding environment, for example, it is influenced by things like thought or lifestyle, which affect the classroom."* This perspective broadens SEL's scope to include cultural and environmental factors which can influence the classroom environment.

FIPT03 described SEL as a framework that *"probably focuses on developing emotional aspects more for learners and also on developing social aspects or related issues."* This definition reflects an awareness of the balance between social and emotional factors in the learning process. However, this interpretation fails to cover SEL's broader objectives such as fostering empathy, collaborative learning or ethical decision-making. In contrast, FIPT04 offered a narrower view: *"It only focuses on two issues, social and emotional issues, right?"* FIPT09 added: *"It is more related to emotional factors, paying attention to the emotions of learners and forming relationships in the classroom."* These responses, although recognizing SEL's core domains, fail to recognize the interconnectedness or how SEL can support learning.

Other pre-service teachers associated SEL to specific teaching practices. FIPT02 highlighted the role of social interaction: *"organizes teaching in a way that creates social interactions for students to learn together, with the aim of guiding emotions."* This aligns with SEL's emphasis on collaborative learning environments that foster SECs through peer interactions. FIPT07 linked SEL directly to language learning: *"I think about the social communication of someone learning this language and certainly, emotional factors cannot be ignored in communication activities."* This response suggests an understanding of how SEL can enhance language acquisition by integrating emotional awareness and effective communication. However, these interpretations focus on emotional and social factors in communication only; other important domains of SEL such as self-awareness, responsible decision-making and self-management are entirely overlooked. This limited scope reflects a lack of comprehensive understanding of SEL among the pre-service teachers.

5.1.2.2. Misconception of SEL as a tool for developing life skills

Some pre-service teachers, such as FIPT03. viewed SEL as life skills education: *"I think it's like life skills education... so students can apply what they learn in real life."* This perspective highlights SEL's potential as a means of preparing students with essential skills for life outside the classroom. However, although SEL and life skills education share common objectives, they are distinct in their scope and focus. SEL specifically targets the development of social emotional skills such as emotional regulation, goal setting, empathy and conflict resolution, which can be fostered, activated, utilized and refined continuously throughout the teaching and learning process (Markowitz et al., 2016). Life skills education, in contrast, encompasses a broader range of practical abilities aimed at preparing students for diverse real-life challenges (UNICEF, 2012). It is often treated as a separate domain which seems to be separated from academic learning; therefore, it is delivered through extra-curricular programs rather than being integrated into the core curriculum.

5.1.2.3. Emphasis on the broader society and the surrounding environment

FIPT06 expanded the definition of SEL by incorporating its social impacts. This interpretation suggests that SEL is not only about individual development but also about contributing to society. FIPT06 explained: *"I see the word 'emotional,' so I think it's about paying attention to the learners' emotions, seeing if they feel interested or if they have any particular feelings or moods related to the subject. And secondly, the word 'social' means whether what they learn can be applied to society and whether it contributes anything to society."* This interpretation reflects an understanding of SEL as beneficial not only for personal development but also for the whole society. Although the exact definition does not explicitly mention social contributions, the skills developed through SEL such as empathy, responsible decision-making and maintaining relationships can naturally contribute to building a better society. There, FIPT06's interpretation of SEL, although incomplete, aligns with the ultimate goal of SEL.

5.1.2.4. SEL and classroom groupings

FIPT01 introduced a novel idea related to SEL. He suggested that *"people with the same values, like social and emotional values, will be grouped into a class to learn together"*. This idea proposes that SEL could involve grouping students with similar social and emotional values to create more cohesive and effective learning environments. However, this interpretation contrasts completely with the goals of SEL. SEL is meant to be inclusive, targeting the development of essential competencies in all students, regardless of their initial social or emotional values. The goal of SEL is helping students develop these competencies in diverse group settings, where they can interact with others who might have different perspectives or personal traits.

In summary, although pre-service EFL teachers' interpretations generally align with SEL's core aspects, such as emotions, social interactions and their impact on learning, they tend to be vague, surface-level, fragmented and varied among individuals. Some pre-service teachers see SEL as primarily focused on emotions and social interactions; others expand its scope to include life skills and social contributions. However, most of the interpretations lack a complete understanding of SEL's broader goals such as empathy, decision-making and relationship-building.

5.1.2.5. Questionnaire data analysis and findings

Based on the various interpretations of SEL provided by the pre-service teachers during the focus group interview, a questionnaire item was developed to quantitatively assess their understanding of the SEL concept. The data collected from 351 pre-service EFL teachers is summarized in Table 15. The majority of the pre-service teachers, 96.9% (340 respondents), demonstrated a correct understanding of SEL by selecting Option C - the accurate definition of SEL. Only a small percentage of pre-service teachers, 1.4% (5

respondents), chose Option A, which incorrectly described SEL as being solely based on emotions and communication. Similarly, another 1.4% of respondents (5 pre-service teachers) selected Option B, which mistakenly viewed SEL as life skills education. Only 0.3% (1 participant) chose Option D, which incorrectly defined SEL as focusing primarily on emotions, environmental influences and social contributions.

Table 15
Quantitative Analysis on Pre-service EFL Teachers' Definitions of SEL

Different Definitions of SEL	Frequency	Percent
WRONG. A. Learning is based on emotions and communication with others. It only focuses on emotional factors and relationships in the classroom.	5	1.4
WRONG. B. SEL is similar to life skills education, aimed at equipping students with essential skills needed for effective functioning and coping in everyday life. It also involves the abilities to apply their learning in real-life situations.	5	1.4
CORRECT. C. The process of acquiring and effectively applying knowledge, attitudes and skills for understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, showing empathy, maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions.	340	96.9
WRONG. D. SEL focuses on learners' emotions in learning and examines whether the learning can be applied and contribute to society. Additionally, SEL considers the influence of the surrounding environment on learning.	1	0.3
Total	351	100

The comparison between the interview and questionnaire reveals a notable difference in how pre-service EFL teachers understand and articulate the concept of SEL. While the majority demonstrated a correct understanding of SEL in the questionnaire, the interview produced a variety of interpretations. This gap can be attributed to the distinct nature of each data collection method. In the questionnaire, the pre-service teachers were provided with predefined options, which made it easier for them to recognize and select the correct definition of SEL. In contrast, the interview required them to explain SEL in their own words, and this resulted in diverse and fragmented interpretations. It can be inferred that pre-service teachers' understanding of SEL is largely intuitive or experiential rather than grounded in formal theoretical frameworks. This finding reflects the indirect ways SEL is embedded in the program, which influences but does not fully clarify pre-service teachers' conceptualizations, leading to incomplete interpretations.

5.1.3. Understanding of the five core social emotional competencies

This section discusses how pre-service EFL teachers interpret the five core SECs, compares their interpretations against established definitions by CASEL (2020), and identifies gaps in their conceptualizations. Findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers recognized certain aspects of SECs, but their interpretations frequently lacked depth, comprehensiveness and practical applicability.

5.1.3.1. Self-awareness

Pre-service teachers could provide quite comprehensive definitions of self-awareness. They could recognize its reflective and introspective nature. FIPT01 focused on self-reflection and emotional recognition: *"the awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, understanding what one is thinking about and recognizing one's current emotions."* FIPT02 focused on the introspective aspect: *"the skill of looking inside oneself and seeing what's within."* FIPT03 viewed self-awareness as a tool for growth: *"If self-awareness is the awareness of strengths and weaknesses, then one can orient oneself through the process of awareness."* This perspective links self-awareness to adaptability and personal development. Similarly, FIPT01 associated self-awareness to identity formation and life direction through existential questions like, *"Who am I? What do I want?"* Other pre-service teachers expanded on the situational aspects of self-awareness. For example, FIPT05 noted: *"self-awareness includes recognizing one's values, personality and emotions and how those emotions fit within different situations."* These interpretations of self-awareness align with CASEL's (2020) definition; however, in their interpretations, little or no attention was given to self-efficacy, self-confidence and optimism, indicating a narrow interpretation.

5.1.3.2. Self-management

Pre-service teachers shared diverse interpretations of self-management, and each highlighted different aspects of this competency. FIPT01 described it as *"the skill to control and adjust things inside oneself to develop effectively."* This definition emphasized the importance of internal regulation and its role in personal development. FIPT01 broke self-management into specific skills such as *"self-discipline, emotional management skills and relationship management skills."* These skills are essential for regulating emotions, maintaining discipline and managing interpersonal relationships.

FIPT05 introduced self-motivation as an important aspect of self-management. He described self-management as *"realizing what needs to be done and how to do it."* This perspective emphasized that every individual needs internal drive and a proactive mindset to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. FIPT12, on the other hand, focused on time management as an essential skill of self-management. He explained: *"It's also necessary to manage time well, for example, setting specific hours for studying, taking breaks or watching movies."* This view highlights the role of effective scheduling in balancing study with rest and recreation to achieve personal and professional growth.

Together, these varied perspectives define self-management as a comprehensive skill set encompassing self-discipline, emotional regulation, motivation and time management. These views align with CASEL's (2020) definition, which highlights the importance of regulating emotions and setting goals as integral aspects of self-management. However,

pre-service EFL teachers gave noticeably less attention to other skills such as managing stress and persevering through obstacles, which are also very important according to Dymnicki et al. (2013). Notably, pre-service teachers introduced two additional elements - time management and motivation. Both of these extra elements expand on existing definitions and indicate an evolving understanding of self-management in response to the current situations and experiences of pre-service EFL teachers.

5.1.3.3. Social awareness

Pre-service EFL teachers shared a variety of interpretations of social awareness. FIPT09 defined social awareness as *"understanding societal development, lifestyles and social ideologies."* This definition involves much broader societal contexts compared to the original definition of social awareness as it emphasizes the importance of staying informed about changes in societal values and ideologies to function properly. Similarly, FIPT04 highlighted the practical application of social knowledge: *"If we only know information from books, but social knowledge is different, sometimes we learn one thing, but in reality, it's something completely different."* This statement points out the gap between learned theoretical knowledge and lived social realities, and stresses the importance of experiential learning and adapting to real-world situations.

In contrast, FIPT01 provided a more personal perspective and described social awareness as *"placing oneself in society, understanding who you are—a child, a friend, a partner— and being aware of the current societal state and trends."* This definition seems to confuse social awareness with self-awareness as it focuses more on how individuals perceive their roles and responsibilities within a social context rather than the ability to understand and respond to the needs and perspectives of others. FIPT03 also provided a confusing interpretation: *"social awareness includes understanding human relationships and societal needs."* As this definition emphasizes human relationships, it blurs the line between social awareness and relationship skills.

In general, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate a partial understanding of social awareness. Their definitions primarily focus on social knowledge and practical application but often overlook essential aspects like understanding others, empathy, perspective-taking and recognizing diversity CASEL (2020). Some pre-service teachers blurred the distinction between social awareness and self-awareness or relationship skills. To foster a more comprehensive understanding, there is a need for targeted training that includes empathy-building, active perspective-taking and diversity respect.

5.1.3.4. Relationship skills

Pre-service EFL teachers shared varied interpretations on relationship skills, with each participant focusing on different dimensions of this competency. FIPT10 defined relationship skills as *"related to group work, pair work, being a leader and collaboration*

between two or three people, focusing on direct relationships, both in work and study." This perspective emphasizes specific and practical skills such as collaboration, leadership and teamwork in academic and professional contexts. FIPT13 described relationship skills as *"the ability to connect with others through teamwork, sharing empathy and building positive relationships."* This interpretation emphasizes the role of empathy and fostering supportive, constructive relationships.

Both perspectives focus on collaboration, leadership and teamwork, which align with the cooperative aspect of relationship skills (CASEL, 2020). However, the pre-service teachers' interpretations overlook more complex aspects of relationship skills. For instance, CASEL (2020) define relationship skills more comprehensively to include abilities like resisting inappropriate social pressure, resolving conflicts constructively and seeking help when needed. These elements are essential for managing relationships, especially in situations where disagreements, misunderstandings or conflicts arise. The absence of these skills in the pre-service teachers' responses indicates a gap in understanding the potential challenges in maintaining healthy and effective relationships.

5.1.3.5. Responsible decision-making

Pre-service teachers' definitions of responsible decision-making focus on accountability, ethical reflection and the consideration of others. FIPT03 demonstrated a strong understanding of the personal responsibility in decision-making: *"I make decisions and I take full responsibility for them."* This interpretation emphasizes the essential aspects of decision-making and the willingness to accept its consequences; however, it appears to overlook the reflective process involved in thoughtful decision-making such as carefully considering options, weighing potential consequences and predicting the impact of one's actions or words on others. This perspective may indicate a somewhat impulsive or risk-tolerant attitude among the youngsters.

By contrast, FIPT02 highlighted the moral responsibility to consider the well-being and rights of others: *"We need to also consider the rights and safety of others who may be affected by the decision."* FIPT03 linked responsible decision-making to self-awareness and self-management: *"We must recognize whether we can handle the workload or if it's too much and adjust accordingly."* It means that effective decision-making involves a realistic evaluation of one's own capacities and limits. This perspective also reinforces that responsible decision-making is not a standalone process but it is closely connected to the other SECs such as self-awareness and social awareness. This interconnected and holistic nature of all the five core SECs has been emphasized by many scholars (e.g. CASEL, 2020; Denham et al., 2014; Weissberg et al., 2015).

In general, pre-service EFL teachers' interpretations of responsible decision-making align with principal elements of CASEL's (2020) definition, which includes evaluating

ethical standards, considering safety and social norms, respecting others and evaluating the consequences of actions. However, some aspects such as identifying solutions for personal and social problems, evaluating the reliability of information, and critical thinking were not clearly addressed in their interpretations. This omission indicates a gap in their understanding of responsible decision-making.

In summary, the focus group interview shows that pre-service EFL teachers have a foundational yet fragmented or incomplete understanding of the five core SECs. Although they recognize important aspects of these skills, their interpretations often lack depth, breadth, practical applicability and an explicit connection to teaching practices. This suggests that teacher education programs should provide more explicit instruction and more opportunities to help pre-service EFL teachers understand and develop these competencies effectively so that in the future they can model and foster all aspects of these competencies for their students.

5.1.3.6. Questionnaire data analysis and findings

The descriptive statistics from the questionnaire validate the above qualitative findings. Table 16 shows pre-service EFL teachers' self-reported knowledge of SEL concepts, principles, teaching and assessment methods. The moderate mean scores (ranging between 2.75 and 2.95 on a 5-point scale) and standard deviations (.49–.62) across all aspects of SEL knowledge imply that they have a moderate understanding of SEL concepts but lack theoretical foundations for teaching and assessment methods.

Table 16
Pre-service EFL Teachers' Self-reported Knowledge of SEL

	Mean	SD
1. I know the concept of SEL.	2.91	.508
2. I can define the key competencies of SEL such as Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills and Responsible decision-making.	2.95	.493
3. I can explain the concepts related to SEL to other people.	2.80	.581
4. I know the core principles and goals of SEL.	2.77	.570
5. I know various methods, strategies and practices for effectively incorporating SEL principles into my EFL teaching practices.	2.72	.626
6. I know methods and tools for assessing students' SECs in the EFL classroom.	2.75	.591

Firstly, the statement *"I know the concept of SEL"* received a mean score of 2.91 (out of 5), with a standard deviation of .508. This indicates that pre-service EFL teachers have a moderate familiarity with the concept of SEL. Regarding the statement *"I can define and differentiate the key competencies of SEL,"* the mean score is 2.95, slightly higher than the previous item, with a standard deviation of .493. This shows that pre-service teachers feel moderately confident in distinguishing between the various SECs—such as self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. When it comes to *"I can explain*

the concepts related to SEL to other people", the mean score drops slightly to 2.80 with a higher standard deviation of .581. It can be inferred that although pre-service teachers may understand SEL concepts for themselves, their confidence in explaining these ideas to others is lower. The item *"I know the core principles and goals of SEL"* received a mean score of 2.77 and a standard deviation of .57. This reflects moderate awareness of SEL's theoretical foundations and objectives among pre-service teachers.

In terms of practical applications, the statement *"I know various methods, strategies and practices for effectively incorporating SEL principles into my EFL teaching"* scored a low mean of 2.72 with the highest standard deviation of .626. This demonstrates significant variations in pre-service EFL teachers' responses and indicates that only some pre-service EFL teachers may feel confident in applying SEL strategies; many others feel less knowledgeable in this area. Finally, the statement *"I know methods and tools for assessing students' SECs in the EFL classroom"* received the lowest mean score of 2.75 with a standard deviation of .591. It can be seen that pre-service EFL teachers have a moderate understanding of how to model, teach and assess students' SECs.

Overall, the combined qualitative and quantitative data indicate that although pre-service EFL teachers have a basic understanding of SEL, this knowledge often lacks depth and breadth. They demonstrate familiarity with fundamental aspects of SEL such as self-awareness, self-management and relationship skills, but their understanding is often limited and surface-level. Moreover, they lack theoretical foundations in teaching and assessment methods for effective practices in the classroom. They got relatively low scores on all aspects of SEL knowledge, especially on teaching and assessment methods. These low scores highlight the need for explicit training to enhance pre-service EFL teachers' formal knowledge and practical applications so that they can understand and implement SEL with greater confidence and clarity.

5.1.4. Sources of knowledge of Social Emotional Learning

The data shown in Figure 21 provides an overview of the sources from which pre-service teachers acquire their knowledge of SEL. The most prominent source is the Internet, accounting for 23.0% of all responses and cited by 75.1% of the respondents. Course lectures are the second most reported source, comprising 16.1% of responses and used by 52.5% of pre-service teachers. This highlights the importance of formal education and structured learning environments in imparting SEL knowledge. Assignments, projects and coursework also play an important role with 12.2% of responses and 39.8% of the cases. This suggests that hands-on activities and practical applications within coursework are valuable for pre-service teachers in understanding and applying SEL principles. These active learning strategies can facilitate deeper understanding and retention of SEL concepts and principles.

Figure 21
Reported Sources of SEL Knowledge
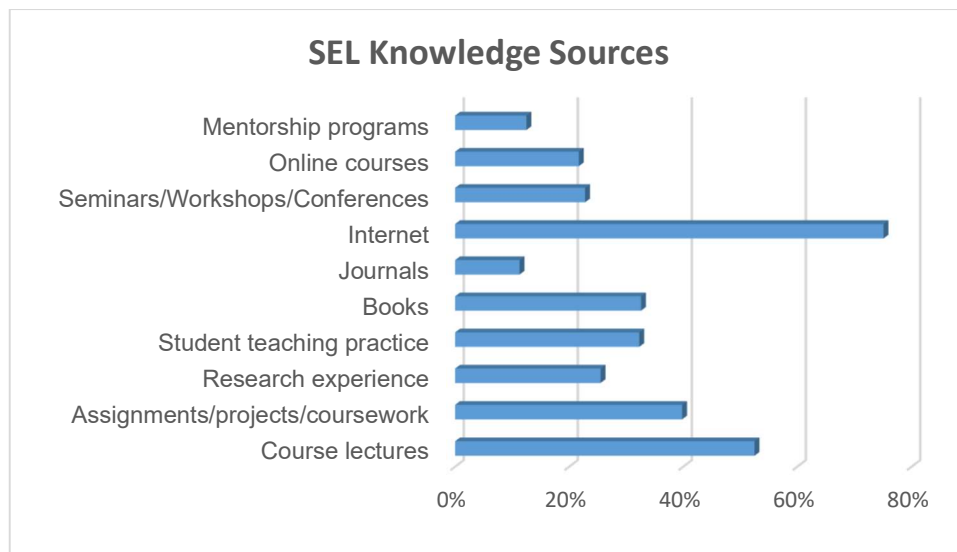
Books are another important source, accounting for 1.0% of responses and cited by 32.6% of -service teachers. Student teaching practice is reported by 32.3% of pre-service EFL teachers and makes up 9.9% of the responses. This indicates that practical, real-world teaching experiences are integral to learning SEL as they allow pre-service EFL teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in classroom settings and refine their skills through direct interaction with students. Research experience, seminars/ workshops/ conferences and online courses each contribute to a smaller but still significant portion of SEL knowledge, ranging from 6.6% to 7.8% of responses. Journals and mentorship programs are less frequently cited, comprising 3.5% and 3.8% of responses, respectively.

Overall, the findings indicate a variety of sources contributing to pre-service EFL teachers' SEL knowledge, with digital platforms and formal coursework providing the greatest exposure. All of these sources contribute to their partial and inconsistent perceptions of SEL and highlight the need for more explicit, structured approach. Strengthening formal instruction, using digital tools and expanding underutilized resources such as mentorship and journals could significantly enhance pre-service EFL teachers' conceptual understanding of SEL.

5.2. Perceived Benefits of Social Emotional Learning

Building on the exploration of pre-service EFL teachers' understanding of SEL, this section examines how they perceive its benefits. They reported a wide range of benefits for both teachers and students across personal, academic and professional domains. Understanding the benefits pre-service EFL teachers associate with SEL, we can assess the extent to which they value and prioritize SEL in their professional learning.

5.2.1. Personal Benefits

Pre-service EFL teachers consistently recognized the personal benefits of SEL. Through self-awareness and goal-setting, teachers and students are better able to understand their emotions, motivations and learning needs. SEL also supports mental health and well-being, helping individuals maintain balance in demanding academic and professional contexts. Additionally, SEL plays an important role in reducing stress and anxiety, which is vital for sustaining motivation and avoiding burnout.

Increased self-awareness and goal-setting

Pre-service EFL teachers viewed SEL as a tool for fostering self-awareness and effective goal-setting. FIPT05 explained, *"First, I will determine what my goals are. These goals will help me in my study and work."* This statement highlights how SEL supports meaningful, actionable goal-setting. FIPT06 reinforced this idea: *"Without a clear goal or good self-awareness, even with effort, we cannot improve ourselves."* These viewpoints emphasize the essential role of self-awareness and goal-setting in driving progress in various aspects of study, work and life.

Promotion of mental health and well-being

The mental health benefits of SEL emerged as another notable theme. FIPT01 noted this benefit: *"It will decide a lot about my mental health."* FIPT05 even described SEL's potential as *"healing."* These responses emphasize the restorative and therapeutic effects of SEL. They suggest that its integration into teacher education could enhance pre-service teachers' mental well-being alongside academic and professional development.

Fostering strengths and addressing weaknesses

Pre-service EFL teachers also recognized SEL's role in helping them maximize strengths and address weaknesses. FIPT01 stated, *"Thanks to SEL, we can identify and develop our potential strengths and at the same time minimize our weaknesses."* As SEL aims to enhance self-awareness and self-management, it enables pre-service teachers to identify their abilities and limitations, set realistic goals, build confidence and make necessary adjustments to improve themselves.

Better integration into surrounding environments

SEL was also seen as very important for adapting to different environments. FIPT01 remarked, *"If we do not have self-awareness and do not know who we are, it will be very difficult to decide how to integrate into the living environment."* This highlights how understanding one's identity, values and strengths influences the ability to interact effectively and contribute meaningfully in various social and professional settings.

5.2.2. Academic Benefits

Beyond personal benefits, pre-service EFL teachers frequently emphasized the academic benefits of SEL. They believe that SEL enables accelerated learning and teaching processes, as emotionally secure students are more engaged and responsive. SEL also strengthens student engagement and academic performance, encouraging learners to take responsibility and develop intrinsic motivation. It also contributes to an improved classroom atmosphere and stronger teacher–student relationships, creating a supportive learning environment where academic goals are more effectively achieved.

Accelerated learning and teaching processes

Pre-service teachers explained how SEL can make teaching and learning more efficient. FIPT05 explained, *"If SEL is applied, it will accelerate the learning and teaching process for both teachers and students,"* as SEL helps create an engaging and inclusive environment. They elaborated, *"Teachers will know what to do with students and students will know why they are learning and how to apply it in reality. This will make learning more comfortable and effective."* SEL enables teachers to build a focused and relevant classroom environment, which, in turn, can boost student engagement and interactions. FIPT02 emphasized that SEL can *"speed up the learning process in class, so time is not wasted."* This perspective is reasonable as better communication and understanding between teachers and students can actually optimize instructional time and foster more productive learning experiences.

Improved classroom atmosphere and teacher-student relationships

Pre-service teachers also shared success stories to illustrate the benefits of SEL in the classroom. FIPT07 recalled his school time and told a very meaningful story which illustrates how his literature teacher at high school effectively applied *"SEL-like principles"* to transform his disruptive class: *"Despite being rated as the most mischievous class in the school, all students had scores above 7 in literature thanks to the guidance and teaching of our literature teacher."* With strong social awareness, that teacher could respond to her students' learning needs and personalities, and foster a supportive and positive learning environment. FIPT07 added that SEL principles strengthened teacher-student relationships, enhanced emotional well-being and boosted academic success. These examples demonstrate how SEL promotes a nurturing classroom atmosphere, enhances student engagement and overall outcomes.

Improved student engagement and academic performance

Pre-service teachers emphasized SEL's positive impact on student engagement and academic success. FIPT12 noted the connection between self-awareness and effective learning: *"When students know who they are and what they need to do, their ability to*

receive knowledge improves a lot." This statement suggests that understanding personal goals and strengths helps students achieve better academic outcomes. FIPT02 reinforced this link: *"I think self-management brings academic benefits; I've made a significant leap. Sometimes we think we're just learning, but actually social emotional factors also influence our academic success."* This perspective highlights how SECs enable students to handle social and emotional challenges, foster deeper engagement and improve academic performance.

5.2.3 Professional Benefits

Pre-service teachers believe that beyond the classroom, SEL fosters real-life applications and career preparedness, providing learners with interpersonal, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, which are very important in the workplace.

Real-life applications and career preparedness

Pre-service EFL teachers recognized SEL as essential for preparing them for real-life challenges and future careers. FIPT03 remarked, *"These skills are important not only for life but also for our study and our jobs."* This idea emphasizes SEL's role in developing competencies like self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills and responsible decision-making, which are important not only for academic settings but also for success in professional and social contexts.

Enhanced determination and perseverance for professional development

SEL was also believed to be able to foster determination, perseverance and a growth mindset. FIPT01 observed that some pre-service EFL teachers fail to develop the professional styles and communication skills needed for effective teaching: *"There are many pre-service teachers who do not change their manner to be like that of a teacher and the way they deliver instructions is difficult to understand. It is due to their lack of determination and perseverance."* He believed that SEL can support the development of these qualities by encouraging pre-service teachers to set personal and professional goals, self-assess progress, persist through challenges, all of which could strengthen their preparedness for teaching roles.

Questionnaire data analysis and findings

Based on all the benefits emerging from the focus group discussion, eleven questionnaire items were built to quantitatively assess how the pre-service teachers perceive SEL benefits. The results reveal a strong consensus among pre-service teachers on the positive impacts of SEL across academic, personal and professional domains (see Table 17). They rated SEL as highly beneficial for helping students integrate into the surrounding environments (M=4.21) as well as for developing strengths and minimizing

weaknesses (M=4.17). Its role in supporting mental health and creating a positive classroom atmosphere was equally valued (M=4.11). Other benefits such as reducing stress (M=3.75) and addressing behavioral issues (M=3.81) received slightly lower ratings, but they were still quite high. Finally, SEL was valued for enhancing student engagement (M=3.88) and preparing them for real-life challenges (M=3.92).

Table 17
Descriptive Statistics on Perceived Benefits of SEL

Perceived Benefits of SEL	Mean	SD
1. Increased self-awareness and goal-setting.	4.09	.793
2. Promoted mental health and well-being.	4.11	.774
3. Fostering student strengths and minimizing weaknesses.	4.17	.801
4. Better adaptation to and integration into the surrounding environments.	4.21	.841
5. Reduced stress and anxiety for both teachers and students.	3.75	.890
6. Reduced behavioral issues and conflicts in the classroom.	3.81	.894
7. Accelerated learning and teaching processes.	3.81	.820
8. Improved positive classroom atmosphere and teacher-student relationships.	4.11	.831
9. Improved student engagement and academic performance.	3.88	.825
1. Real-life applications and career preparedness.	3.92	.802
11. Enhanced determination & perseverance for professional development.	4.05	.814

In summary, despite the implicit nature of SEL training in the curriculum leading to their limited conceptual understanding, pre-service teachers consistently expressed positive attitudes toward the role of SEL in language education. They strongly perceive SEL as beneficial in fostering their personal growth, academic achievement and professional development. However, teacher education programs still need to move from implicit exposure to explicit instruction to ensure that pre-service teachers can not only value but also effectively operationalize SEL in their professional practice.

5.3. Perceived Roles and Preparedness in Promoting Social Emotional Learning

This section examines pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles they believe teachers should play in promoting SEL and their self-reported preparedness to realize those roles. The findings show that while pre-service teachers consistently recognized the importance of teachers in modeling, facilitating and integrating SEL, their readiness to do so were generally limited.

5.3.1. Perceived Roles of EFL Teachers in SEL

This section examines how pre-service EFL teachers perceive the role of EFL teachers in promoting SEL within their classrooms. Understanding these perceptions are important as they may influence the quality and effectiveness of SEL implementation in their teaching practices.

5.3.1. The feasibility of teaching SECs in the EFL classroom

An important theme in the focus group discussion is the perceived feasibility of teaching SECs within the EFL classroom. In other words, pre-service EFL teachers believed that SECs are teachable or malleable thanks to the availability of relevant resources. FIPT03 confidently stated, *"I think SECs can be taught because there are many foreign resources in the field of psychology that we can exploit to suit the needs of our students and our field."* This statement illustrates the recognition that EFL teachers can use resources from psychology and SEL research to develop their students' SECs.

5.3.2. EFL teachers as "second parents"

Another important theme that emerges from the interview is the comparison of teachers as "second parents." This metaphor emphasizes the deep sense of responsibility that pre-service EFL teachers feel in fostering SECs for their students. FIPT03 explained, *"It is often said that teachers are like second parents, so I think teachers need to help students develop these SECs."* This statement reflects the view that teachers are not merely academic instructors but also caretakers who are responsible for their students' holistic development. The comparison to parenting highlights the nurturing aspect of teaching, where teachers are expected to take responsibility for developing SECs in their students.

5.3.3. Teachers as facilitators and connectors

EFL teachers are also seen as facilitators and connectors within the SEL process. They are expected to guide students through their academic and social-emotional development. FIPT03 emphasized this role: *"Teachers play an important role in adjusting, promoting and being the bridge for all activities in this process."* This perspective highlights the idea that teachers need to create a classroom environment where academic, social and emotional learning are interconnected. When promoting SEL, teachers help students make meaningful connections between their social-emotional experiences and their academic learning. The role of teachers as facilitators is important beccause it emphasizes their responsibility in ensuring that SEL is naturally integrated into classroom practices to help students develop both cognitively, socially and emotionally. Teachers, in this sense, act as bridges to connect various learning experiences and ensure that students are supported in all aspects of their development.

5.3.4. EFL teachers as models of SECs

A very interesting point raised by pre-service EFL teachers is the importance of teachers modeling the SECs they teach. FIPT01 stressed: "*The teachers also have to do this. They must have good SECs. If students hear the teacher talk about SECs in class but then see the teacher not practicing them in reality, they will think it's just preaching and nobody*

likes that." This view emphasizes the need for authenticity in teaching SECs. Students are more likely to acquire SECs if they see their teachers demonstrating or modeling them in real-life contexts. FIPT02 reinforced this role: *"First, you have to master SEL skills. Only when you master these skills can you teach these skills to your students."* This statement highlights the belief that teachers must first develop and master their own SECs before they can effectively teach them to their students.

5.3.5. The unique role of EFL teachers in promoting SEL

Different from other subjects, language learning offers unique opportunities for integrating SEL because of its inherent focus on communication and cultural understanding. FIPT03 stated: "*I think English and literature are the two most suitable subjects for integrating this SEL model because English provides learners with many social issues similar to literature."* This viewpoint indicates that EFL teachers have more opportunities to promote SEL in their lessons as language lessons often involve discussions on human experiences, social issues and cultural diversity. These discussions naturally align with the goals of SEL in that they provide an ideal context for developing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship skills.

FIPT05 reinforced this view: *"English teachers play a significant part. English provides students with many opportunities to deal with social and emotional issues, so English teachers hold a very important role in developing students' SECs."* This statement emphasizes the important role that EFL teachers play in fostering students' SECs. Through language lessons, teachers encourage students to manage their emotions, boost confidence, engage in social interactions, build relationships, express opinions, consider different perspectives, think about global issues and make responsible decisions. This aligns with the educational philosophy of SEL, which seeks to promote empathy, cultural understanding and ethical decision-making as part of the learning process.

5.3.6. The need for a collaborative approach

Finally, pre-service EFL teachers emphasized the need for a collaborative approach to SEL, where responsibility for promoting SECs in students is shared by different stakeholders. FIPT06 shared this view: "*In order to balance the academic contents and the social emotional factors in the classroom, there must be cooperation between the English teacher, the homeroom teacher and teachers of other subjects."* This perspective emphasizes the importance of a team-based approach to SEL, where EFL teachers work alongside homeroom teachers, subject teachers and other educators to create a supportive and cohesive learning environment. FIPT05 added, *"The responsibility for fostering students' SECs belongs to the whole society, the entire community, in which English teachers play a significant part."* This reflects the understanding that SEL cannot be the

sole responsibility of individual teachers; rather, it requires a community-wide effort involving educators, parents and the whole society. Given the time constraints and the diverse needs of students, collaboration is seen as essential for effectively promoting SEL not only inside but also outside the classroom.

In summary, the focus group interview with pre-service EFL teachers reveals that they recognize their multiple roles in promoting SEL. EFL teachers are seen as second parents, facilitators, models and collaborators in the SEL process. As they recognize these roles, it is more likely for them to implement SEL in their classroom.

5.3.7. Questionnaire data analysis and findings

Moving to quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics show a strong consensus among pre-service EFL teachers regarding the roles of EFL teachers in promoting SEL (see Table 18). The descriptive statistics show high mean scores across all five core SECs. This suggests that pre-service EFL teachers view the development of these competencies as an essential part of an EFL teacher's responsibility.

Table 18
Perceived Roles of EFL Teachers in Fostering SECs for Students

	N	Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	351	3.99	.858
Self-Management	351	4.07	.788
Social Awareness	351	3.77	.854
Relationship Skills	351	3.82	.888
Responsible Decision Making	351	4.03	.868

The highest mean score is recorded for Self-Management (M=4.07, SD=.788). It means that pre-service EFL teachers place particular emphasis on the role of EFL teachers in helping students regulate their emotions and behaviors. Similarly, Responsible Decision-Making (M=4.03. SD=.868) is also rated highly. This strong emphasis may be influenced by CHC values, which typically prioritize self-discipline, perseverance and moral responsibility in education. Self-Awareness (M=3.99, SD=.858) and Relationship Skills (M=3.82, SD=.888) are also viewed as important roles for EFL teachers. Finally, Social Awareness (M=3.77, SD=.854) is rated slightly lower but still indicates a strong belief in the teacher's role in promoting this competence for students.

Overall, both the qualitative and quantitative data reveal that pre-service EFL teachers recognized the multiple roles of teachers in not only delivering language instructions but also fostering SECs for students. This finding is particularly significant in the context of Vietnam's recent education reforms, which emphasize a shift from traditional knowledge transmission to competency-based and holistic education. Their recognition of SEL's benefits and teachers' roles for SEL indicates a willingness, receptiveness or openness to adopt new educational approaches like SEL to foster student holistic development.

5.3.2. Preparedness for SEL Implementation

This section examines pre-service EFL teachers' preparedness to implement SEL in their teaching practices based on self-reported data and assessments from trainers. The results show that although they recognized the values of SEL and teacher roles in SEL, many reported feeling only moderately prepared to implement SEL in teaching practice.

5.3.2.1. Self-reported preparedness for SEL implementation

Although pre-service teachers self-assessed their own SECs as relatively strong, many expressed uncertainty about their ability to implement SEL in EFL teaching practices. FIPT02 candidly noted: *"I think it's not enough. I think I need more experience. I self-assess my SECs at level 4, but having these skills is different from being able to teach them."* This statement indicates that pre-service teachers recognize the difference between possessing personal SECs and the ability to teach them for students. This gap reflects a notable gap in the training program, which may develop personal SECs for pre-service teachers, but the limited training in SEL instructional competence limits their preparedness for implementing SEL.

Quantitative data from the self-reported questionnaire supports the above qualitative findings. As can be seen in Table 19, pre-service teachers self-assessed their overall preparedness for SEL at moderate to high level, but not outstanding. These descriptive statistics reveal important differences across various components of SEL instructional competence. They reported the highest confidence in their ability to design and organize activities to foster SECs for students in EFL teaching (SELIC 4), with a mean score of 3.62 (SD=.797). This suggests that they feel relatively well-prepared to plan and execute activities such as role-playing, discussions or reflective exercises that can promote the development of SECs in students. The moderate standard deviation indicates a general consensus among respondents regarding their competence in this area.

Table 19
Self-reported Preparedness for SEL among Pre-service EFL Teachers

SEL Instructional Competence (SELIC) Components	Mean	SD
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy in EFL teaching	3.54	.813
SELIC 2. Apply SEL concepts explicitly to address social & emotional issues in EFL teaching	2.98	.531
SELIC 3. Model good social emotional competencies in EFL teaching	3.50	.888
SELIC 4. Organize activities to foster SECs for students in EFL teaching	3.62	.797
SELIC 5. Assess students' SECs	2.98	.478

Similarly, pre-service EFL teachers expressed confidence in their ability to apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy in EFL teaching (SELIC 1), with a mean score of 3.54 (SD=.813). This high score reflects their preparedness in applying theoretical

frameworks related to psychological and cognitive development as well as pedagogical principles in their teaching practices. This foundational competence may result from the integration of psychological and pedagogical theory in their teacher education programs, which provides them with a firm foundation in these areas.

In terms of modeling good SECs in EFL teaching (SELIC 3), pre-service EFL teachers reported a high level of preparedness, with a mean of 3.50 (SD=.888). This score indicates that although they feel somewhat prepared to serve as role models for SECs like self-awareness, empathy and responsible decision-making, there is still room for improvement. The slightly higher standard deviation suggests varying levels of confidence among pre-service EFL teachers. It indicates that some pre-service EFL teachers may feel more capable of modeling these SECs than others.

In contrast, pre-service EFL teachers reported much lower confidence in their ability to apply knowledge of SEL theories, concepts and principles in EFL teaching (SELIC 2), with a mean score of 2.98 (SD=.531). This low score suggests that pre-service teachers may lack explicit theories in SEL; therefore, they are not prepared enough to incorporate SEL concepts into their teaching practices. The lower standard deviation reflects some consistency in this perception, indicating that this is a common challenge among the pre-service EFL teachers.

Another area where pre-service EFL teachers feel the least prepared is in assessing students' SECs (SELIC 5), with a mean score of 2.98 (SD=.478). This low score highlights a significant gap in their ability to assess SECs of their students. The small standard deviation indicates that this challenge is common among the pre-service EFL teachers. This lack of preparedness suggests that teacher training programs need to provide more targeted support in equipping pre-service EFL teachers with the methods and tools necessary to assess students' SECs effectively.

In summary, although pre-service EFL teachers feel relatively prepared in designing activities to foster SECs, applying pedagogical principles and modelling SECs, they expressed a lack of preparedness in applying explicit SEL concepts and assessing students' SECs. This indicates a need for more focused training in explicit SEL theories and in assessment strategies to ensure that pre-service EFL teachers are fully prepared to integrate SEL into their teaching practices.

5.3.2.2. Teacher trainers' assessment of pre-service teachers' preparedness for SEL

Interviews with EFL teacher trainers confirm the variations in pre-service EFL teachers' preparedness to implement SEL in teaching practices. ITT04 explained, *"It depends on the individual pre-service teacher because I think their abilities are not the same."* These variations may result from differences in prior teaching experience, personal motivation and the extent of training they receive. In addition, the strength of pre-service teachers'

SECs directly influences their ability to apply SEL instructional competence in their teaching. According to ITT04, *"Those with good SECs will handle teaching and educational situations more effectively and flexibly,"* which equips them to integrate SEL principles more successfully. Conversely, ITT04 observed that *"Those whose SECs are not yet high may not have the ability to organize and implement this model in their teaching."* The connection between SECs and SEL instructional competence highlights the need for training programs to focus on developing personal SECs and emphasize their practical application in teaching.

Although training programs provide a foundational understanding of SEL instructional competence, this preparation is often described as insufficient for comprehensive implementation. ITT04 noted, *"If we successfully implement the learning outcomes in the training program... our pre-service teachers will be prepared at a basic level."* It means that the current training program already contains SEL elements, but these elements are implicit and operate at a basic level. This implicit integration may lead to potentially uneven development of essential skills. Therefore, ITT04 emphasized the need for further training: *"For effectiveness and success, they need further practice and personal experience."* The program could provide pre-service teachers with a more thorough understanding of SEL principles and strategies to better prepare them to incorporate SEL into their teaching.

Practical teaching experience plays an important role in developing SEL instructional competence components. ITT05 shared: *"The best way for pre-service teachers to learn these skills is just from doing it themselves and encountering the challenges, being self-aware of their triumphs and failures and understanding what they can do better in the future."* Internships and teaching practicums provide pre-service EFL teachers with opportunities to observe, practice and adapt to the real classroom. However, ITT05 stressed that the most significant growth occurs when teachers independently handle challenges and reflect on their experiences. These practical experiences will help pre-service teachers develop context-specific strategies for implementing SEL.

Feedback from schools on the training programs and competencies of EFL graduates is also relatively positive. ITT03 shared, *"English graduates who are assigned to work in the provinces receive positive feedback from schools."* This feedback suggests that EFL graduates possess foundational pedagogical knowledge, skills and qualities, including SEL-related skills. However, ITT03 implied that positive feedback should not lead to complacency but instead serve as a foundation for further refinement to ensure graduates are better equipped to meet the increasing demands of modern classrooms. Therefore, pre-service EFL teachers' preparedness for SEL depends a lot on a balance of theoretical knowledge, hands-on experience and continuous professional development.

In summary, pre-service teachers perceive themselves as moderately prepared. Trainers confirm this view, assessing their readiness as basic but promising, with clear variation depending on individual SECs, motivation and training experiences. These findings reflect the implicit way SEL is currently integrated in the program, leaving pre-service teachers valuing SEL but without clear strategies for practice. There is a recognized need for further training, especially explicit theories, practical experiences and continuous professional development.

5.4. Perceived Barriers, Training Needs and Recommendations

This section explores pre-service EFL teachers' perspectives on the barriers to implementing SEL, the need for training, and their recommendations for improving SEL integration in teacher education. Understanding these barriers and needs provides an empirical evidence of both the challenges and opportunities for strengthening SEL in the Vietnamese context.

5.4.1. Perceived Barriers to the Implementation of SEL

Although pre-service EFL teachers recognized the importance of SEL, they reported significant challenges and barriers that they face in integrating SEL into their teaching practices. These barriers include limited student engagement, time constraints, insufficient teacher proficiency in SECs, the absence of formal SEL training, resistance to student-centered methodologies and resource inadequacies. Understanding these obstacles helps identify areas where support is needed to ensure SEL is more effectively integrated into teaching practices. The barriers pre-service teachers experience will also influence their practices in the classroom, which will be explored in the next chapter.

5.4.1.1. Lack of explicit training in SEL

The lack of explicit, formal training in SEL emerged as one of the most significant barriers to SEL implementation. FIPT01 emphasized, *"Teachers need to help students develop these SECs. The issue is how to do that."* This comment reflects a pressing concern among pre-service EFL teachers: although they understand the importance of developing students' SECs, they feel inadequately prepared to do so due to a lack of training. Other pre-service teachers expressed concern about insufficient emphasis on specific competencies such as self-awareness. FIPT05 noted, *"I don't see any element in the training program that helps students develop self-awareness."* This gap was reinforced by FIPT03: *"I think it's included but somewhat vague; the focus is on methods and education."* This lack of explicit focus on important SECs signals a need for more structured and deliberate efforts to ensure these competencies are consistently and explicitly developed across all areas of teacher training.

FIPT05 added: *"Actually, I think in our curriculum, it's all there, but the issue is that in the classroom, the focus is mostly on what is considered professional knowledge and*

language skills." This comment reveals an important issue: although SEL content is present in the curriculum, it is often treated as secondary, optional or extra-curricular. The presentation of SEL by instructors may also play a role, as FIPT05 noted, *"It may be from both sides: the lecturer might talk vaguely, without intention, so the pre-service teachers don't pay attention."* Trainers agreed with this point: *"SEL is included indirectly, but because it is not labeled, students fail to see it"* [ITT02].This comment indicates that the delivery of SEL may lack intentionality and focus, and this further contributes to pre-service EFL teachers' disengagement and missed opportunities for SEL training. To overcome this barrier, teacher education programs must adopt a more intentional approach to SEL to ensure that it is presented in a more explicit and deliberate manner to pre-service EFL teachers.

5.4.1.2. Limited student engagement and receptiveness

Limited student engagement and receptiveness is also a frequently cited barrier. FIPT03 summarized this challenge: *"I want many things, but whether students can receive them is still quite limited."* This statement indicates the gap between teachers' aspirations for SEL and the reality of student participation. Although pre-service EFL teachers implement SEL enthusiastically, their efforts are often hindered by students' lack of engagement, and this may reduce the effectiveness of SEL in the classroom. Observations confirmed that some activities designed to foster cooperation or empathy were met with hesitation and reluctance [OPT05]. This issue indicates an important concern: the success of SEL depends not only on the teacher's ability to deliver it but also on students' willingness to engage. However, limited engagement reflects not only students' attitudes but also the need for pre-service teachers to adopt more engaging strategies. Addressing this barrier calls for enhanced training for pre-service teachers to equip them with practical techniques to create a more engaging environment for SEL.

5.4.1.3. Time constraint

Time constraint is another significant obstacle to the effective implementation of SEL. FIPT03 explained: *"With so much focus on test preparation, grammar and vocabulary, there is little room for social-emotional skills"*. They felt constrained by expectations that language teaching should prioritize grammar, vocabulary and test scores, leaving SEL marginalized. FIPT06 added, *"In high school, we only have four English lessons per week and it's not enough time to help students develop SECs effectively if it's just the English teacher alone."* This barrier reflects a systemic issue in which the structure of the curriculum leaves little room for SEL. Addressing this challenge requires systemic changes that prioritize SEL across the curriculum to ensure that time constraints do not impede the holistic development of students. Furthermore, collaboration among educators can help distribute the responsibility of teaching SECs to make it more feasible.

5.4.1.4. Insufficient mastery of SECs among some teachers

Another barrier identified by pre-service EFL teachers is the insufficient mastery of the five core SECs among teachers themselves. FIPT02 observed, *"I think these skills help accelerate classroom learning, so it doesn't take too much time. However, there might be a burden. Because I think some teachers have not fully developed these five skills, it's a bit difficult for them to teach these skills effectively."* This statement points out a significant concern: although pre-service EFL teachers acknowledge the importance of SECs in enhancing learning, their ability to effectively teach these competencies is limited by their own proficiency in them. This issue emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to focus not only on equipping pre-service EFL teachers with SEL instructional competence but also on helping them develop their own SECs. Pre-service EFL teachers who lack personal mastery of SECs are less likely to be able to model or teach these skills effectively.

5.4.1.5. Lack of specialized resources

The lack of specialized resources is also a big challenge pre-service EFL teachers face in implementing SEL. FIPT02 remarked, *"I think we can only gain experience and learn gradually, but right now, finding a specialized source for SEL is quite difficult."* This comment illustrates the difficulty pre-service EFL teachers experience in accessing materials that are specifically designed to practice SEL in EFL classrooms. The absence of comprehensive, clear resources not only limits pre-service EFL teachers' ability to implement SEL but also hampers their confidence in teaching it. FIPT01 noted, *"I think there needs to be full, clear materials to teach SEL."* Without adequate resources, pre-service EFL teachers are left to rely on their own experiences, which can slow the progress of SEL implementation and lead to inconsistencies in teaching practices. Addressing this barrier requires the development of specialized SEL resources which can provide them with practical tools and strategies for fostering SECs in the classroom.

5.4.1.6. Lack of personal responsibility in the development of SEL competencies

Another barrier is the lack of personal responsibility in the development of SECs and SEL instructional competence. FIPT06 explained this barrier: *"The teacher trainer can tell me to manage my time well and do this or that, but whether I do it or not depends on me."* This comment reflects the challenge of fostering self-regulation and intrinsic motivation among pre-service EFL teachers in fostering SECs and SEL instructional competence. This sense of self-directed responsibility is important for ensuring that pre-service EFL teachers take an active role in their own SECs and SEL instructional competence. Although external support and training are necessary, real progress comes from pre-service EFL teachers' own effort and commitment to applying what they learn. Therefore, teacher education programs need to emphasize the importance of self-directed learning and personal accountability in SEL training to help pre-service teachers

recognize that the development of SECs and SEL instructional competence is an ongoing process that requires their active participation and commitment.

In summary, the focus group interview reveals several significant barriers to implementing SEL among pre-service EFL teachers. Issues such as limited student engagement, time constraints, insufficient teacher proficiency in SECs, lack of training and resources and disengagement with SEL content all contribute to the challenges pre-service EFL teachers face in integrating SEL into their teaching practices.

5.4.1.7. Quantitative analysis of perceived barriers to SEL implementation

Based on all the barriers identified from the focus group interview and discussed above, a questionnaire item was built to quantitatively assess how the pre-service EFL teachers perceive SEL in terms of barriers to implementation. Table 20 shows the descriptive statistics for the barriers perceived by pre-service EFL teachers in implementing SEL in their teaching. The relatively high mean scores across these barriers suggest that pre-service EFL teachers generally agree on the presence of these obstacles.

Table 20
Perceived Barriers to SEL Implementation

Barriers	Mean	SD
1. Limited knowledge or understanding of SEL concepts and strategies.	3.63	.708
2. Lack of training and professional development in SEL.	3.70	.782
3. Difficulty in balancing time for social, emotional & academic requirements.	3.66	.898
4. Insufficient access to appropriate SEL resources and materials.	3.60	.787
5. Difficulty in engaging students in social emotional activities.	3.62	.805
6. Insufficient human and financial resources.	3.68	.795
7. Insufficient mastery of the five core SECs among some teachers.	3.61	.827
8. Resistance from teachers to new teaching methods or extra responsibilities.	3.65	.804
9. Lack of support from the broader educational system to implement SEL.	3.62	.798
1. Challenges in managing large class sizes.	3.62	.794

The most significant barrier identified by pre-service EFL teachers is the lack of training and professional development in SEL, with a mean score of 3.70 (SD=.782). This high score suggests that many pre-service teachers feel underprepared to implement SEL due to insufficient formal training opportunities. The second most significant barrier is difficulty in balancing time for social, emotional and academic requirements, with a mean of 3.66 (SD=.898). However, the higher standard deviation here indicates some variations in how pre-service teachers perceive this challenge, possibly due to differences in personal teaching philosophy and styles.

Several other barriers are closely ranked, including insufficient human and financial resources (M=3.68, SD=.795) and limited knowledge of SEL concepts and strategies (M=3.63. SD=.708). These scores reflect concerns about the availability of necessary resources such as staffing and materials as well as the knowledge required to implement

SEL effectively. The high scores for these barriers suggest that more institutional support and clearer guidance on SEL concepts and strategies are needed. Pre-service teachers also perceive resistance from teachers to new teaching methods or extra responsibilities (M=3.65, SD=.804) as a significant challenge. This indicates that resistance to change among some educators may impede the adoption of SEL practices. Additionally, difficulty in engaging students in social emotional activities (M=3.62, SD=.805) and managing large class sizes (M=3.62, SD=.794) are seen as notable barriers.

In summary, both qualitative and quantitative data show that lack of explicit training is the most significant barrier to SEL implementation among pre-service EFL teachers. Other challenges include balancing time for social, emotional and academic needs, insufficient resources and resistance to new methods. These findings suggest that teacher training programs need to provide explicit, structured training and resources; otherwise SEL will remain valued in perceptions but difficult to operationalize in practices.

5.4.2. Perceived Need for Training in SEL

The focus group interview and then the questionnaire reveal a strong perceived need among pre-service EFL teachers for more structured and explicit training in SECs and SEL instructional competence to prepare them for effective SEL implementation.

5.4.2.1. Perceived need for training in Social Emotional Competencies (SECs)

The focus group interview reveals a strong perceived need among pre-service EFL teachers for more targeted training in SECs. FIPT04 shared, *"I think we need more opportunities to develop these SECs. If we only learn academic basics, it will become quite boring because these programs were designed long ago and haven't evolved much. Now, newer training programs have introduced courses like 21st-Century Skills Development, University Learning Skills and Entrepreneurship. This is already a change. These kinds of courses should be introduced so that instead of being stuck in monotonous lessons, we have new directions to reinforce and improve academic learning in a more engaging and accessible way."* This comment emphasizes the need for renewing the curriculum to adapt to contemporary educational priorities. Incorporating SEL courses could reinforce academic learning by making it more engaging and accessible.

Pre-service EFL teachers consistently described SECs as hierarchical and interdependent, with self-awareness and self-management serving as the foundation. For example, FIPT01 explained: *"For a language teacher, self-awareness comes first, followed by self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and finally social awareness."* This perspective emphasizes the necessity of building a strong personal foundation to support the development of more complex skills like decision-making, relationship-building and social awareness.

Pre-service EFL teachers also highlighted the interconnectedness of self-awareness and self-management as essential for both personal and professional growth. FIPT05 illustrates this connection: *"When setting plans, one must recognize whether they can achieve them and, if not, adjust workload and time appropriately. Self-awareness and self-management are closely connected."* This view emphasizes that understanding one's strengths and limitations through self-awareness informs the ability to regulate behavior and effectively manage tasks.

Several pre-service EFL teachers emphasized that mastering self-awareness and self-management lays the foundation for the development of other competencies. For instance, FIPT02 stated: *"Combining self-awareness and self-management helps develop social awareness."* Similarly, FIPT03 highlighted the importance of acting on self-awareness: *"You might be aware of something, but if you don't act on it, the result remains the same; therefore, self-management is the key."* These perspectives emphasize the foundational role of self-awareness and self-management as prerequisites for developing other competencies like responsible decision-making and relationship skills.

The important role of social awareness and relationship skills in teaching was also widely recognized. FIPT01 articulated this need: *"As a teacher, I would need social awareness to understand and connect with students and make them feel comfortable."* This perspective highlights the importance of empathy and the ability to create a supportive and engaging classroom environment where students feel valued and understood.

Many pre-service EFL teachers proposed hierarchical models for developing SECs. FIPT03 categorized these competencies into three levels: *"Level 1 includes self-awareness and self-management; Level 2 is responsible decision-making and Level 3 comprises social awareness and relationship skills."* This classification reflects the belief that personal competencies must be developed first to provide a strong foundation for more complex social and relational skills.

Similarly, FIPT05 suggested a pyramid model, where self-awareness forms the base, followed by social awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making and finally relationship skills at the top: *"If I were to arrange these five competencies, I would arrange them in the shape of a pyramid. The competencies at the bottom would serve as the foundation for developing those at the top."* This model emphasizes that foundational competencies are necessary for managing emotions, making responsible decisions and building meaningful relationships. This model reflects a logical progression and illustrate how intrapersocal skills supports the development of interpersonal skills.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers consistently viewed SECs as important. interconnected and hierarchical, with self-awareness and self-management seen as the foundation for personal and professional effectiveness. These foundational competencies

enable the development of other SECs like social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making, which are important for creating empathetic and supportive learning environments. Pre-service teachers also emphasized the need for teacher education programs to adopt a holistic and flexible approach to training in SECs. In other words, teacher training programs should personalize training based on individual needs and career goals; however, they still need to keep a balance and integrate the teaching of SECs across various courses and activities to better prepare future teachers for the challenges of their teaching profession.

5.4.2.2. Perceived need for training in SEL instructional competence

The analysis reveals that pre-service EFL teachers perceive the development of SEL instructional competence as important for effective teaching. However, they feel that they need more preparation for this aspect of their professional roles. FIPT01 highlighted the urgent need for practical strategies: *"Teachers need to help students develop these SECs. The issue is how to do that."* This statement emphasizes a common concern among pre-service EFL teachers: although they understand the importance of teaching SECs, they feel insufficiently prepared to implement SEL effectively in the classroom.

Pre-service EFL teachers also expressed concerns about the lack of explicit focus on SEL instructional competence within their training. For instance, FIPT05 remarked: *"I don't see any element in the training program that helps us develop SEL instructional competence."* Similarly, FIPT03 noted: *"I think it's included but somewhat vague."* These concerns highlight a gap in the training curriculum, where SEL principles may be embedded in various components of the program, but they are not clearly labeled or systematically addressed; as a result, pre-service teachers could not notice, recognize, internalize or apply them in their teaching practice.

Pre-service EFL teachers also stressed the need for professional development opportunities that focus on practical, hands-on training. FIPT01 articulated this clearly: *"We also need training on how to teach SEL because if it's not taught carefully, pre-service EFL teachers will understand but won't be able to apply it in reality."* This reflects a strong desire for more comprehensive and practical training to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom practice.

5.4.2.3. Questionnaire data analysis and findings

Moving on to the quantitative data, Table 21 shows the mean scores for pre-service EFL teachers' perceived need for being trained in SECs and SEL instructional competence. The mean scores for the competencies range from 3.75 to 3.91 on a 5-point scale, indicating a consistently high recognition of the importance of being trained in SEL.

Table 21

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceived Need for Training in SEL

	Mean	SD
Self-awareness	3.77	.858
Self-management	3.88	.842
Social awareness	3.75	.817
Relationship skills	3.82	.871
Responsible decision-making	3.88	.895
SEL instructional competence	3.91	.782

It is interesting to note that SEL instructional competence received the highest mean score (M=3.91, SD=.782), indicating that pre-service EFL teachers perceive a strong need for training in this competence. This high score reflects their recognition of the important role that SEL instructional competence plays in effective teaching. Among the five core SECs, self-management and responsible decision-making share the second highest mean score (M=3.88), followed closely by relationship skills (M=3.82) and self-awareness (M=3.77). Social awareness received the lowest mean score among the items, but it still scored highly (M=3.75). The relatively close mean scores, along with moderate standard deviations, suggest that pre-service EFL teachers consistently view all these competencies as essential to their personal and professional development.

The findings reflect pre-service teachers'perceptions of their professional needs to develop both their SECs and SEL instructional competence to enhance their personal development and teaching effectiveness. They prioritize strengthening their personal SECs as a foundation while simultaneously calling for explicit, structured training in SEL instructional competence. To address these gaps, the teacher education program plays a pivotal role in providing targeted training opportunities.

5.4.3. Recommendations for Enhancing SEL in Teacher Education

Finally, this section discusses the recommendations put forward by pre-service EFL teachers on how to promote SEL integration in teacher education. It also outlines the specific support they need to feel fully prepared to implement SEL. These ideas will provide practical recommendations for enhancing teacher training programs.

5.4.3.1. Integrating SEL into the program in a more explicit manner

Pre-service EFL teachers highlighted the importance of making SEL training more explicit within their curriculum to ensure a clear understanding and practical application in teaching. FIPT13 shared: *"Actually, I think all the instructors may have already integrated SEL into their lessons, but we don't realize it."* This statement reveals a disconnect between what is included in the curriculum and what students are able to consciously identify. FIPT03 also emphasized the need for greater clarity: "*I think the training program needs to make SEL elements clearer and more prominent, because*

often we don't realize them. When we don't recognize them, we aren't aware of them and by the time we're teaching at secondary schools, we won't be able to implement them in our teaching. We won't emphasize them and they will remain vague, so only those students who are already good will realize them. Those who already have strong SECs will pick up on them, but those who don't will likely miss them." These perspectives emphasize the necessity of introducing SEL explicitly so that pre-service EFL teachers can comprehend and intentionally implement it effectively in their teaching practices.

5.4.3.2. Offering dedicated SEL courses

Many pre-service EFL teachers expressed a desire for separate, dedicated or stand-alone SEL courses that focus on integrating SEL into English teaching. FIPT03 stated: *"I would really like to have a separate course on integrating SEL elements into teaching English."* FIPT13 elaborated on this view: *"It would give us more confidence when managing a large classroom and fostering those five SECs in students."* Such a course would allow deeper exploration of SEL theories, practical strategies and assessments, addressing the gaps in current implicit training. FIPT05 added that such a course could align with current trends and concerns: *"I think if my program had a course called SEL, it would be very trendy because I feel that today's young people care more about social emotional issues and mental health."* It means that SEL courses can catch up with contemporary educational priorities and align with the interests of today's learners.

5.4.3.3. Making SEL courses mandatory

A major concern expressed by pre-service EFL teachers was whether SEL should be mandatory or elective. FIPT10 strongly advocated for making SEL courses mandatory or at least emphasized within the teacher training programs. He pointed out that, *"If there were a course on SEL in the program, it should either be mandatory or, if elective, teacher trainers should provide orientation beforehand because many pre-service teachers may not know anything about this SEL model."* This suggestion highlights the need for SEL courses to be more visible and structured to ensure that its relevance is understood by all pre-service teachers, especially before they select it as an elective.

The issue of student engagement with elective courses was raised by another participant, FIPT06: *"I think if SEL was in the elective category, the rate of selection wouldn't be high because without clear information or orientation, pre-service teachers might not be interested in it."* This suggests that even though SEL may be valuable, without sufficient orientation or explanation, it may fail to attract enough pre-service teachers. Another concern was raised by FIPT10 regarding course enrollment: *"In order to open a course, there must be enough pre-service teachers enrolled. There are courses, like IT, that I wouldn't want to retake but we still had to take it."* This points to a broader issue of how student choice impacts the availability of important courses.

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In summary, making SEL courses mandatory or, at least, providing clearer guidance and orientation for pre-service teachers is seen as essential to make SEL a more prominent and integral part of the teacher training program. Without these steps, SEL may continue to be treated as optional, unimportnat, with little attention or understanding.

5.4.3.4. Integrating SEL into existing courses in a structured manner

Some pre-service EFL teachers believe that integrating SEL into existing courses, such as pedagogy, methodology and practicum, would be more practical than introducing a new separate course. FIPT04 suggested: *"Integrating SEL into existing courses would be better because getting pre-service teachers to accept a new course will take a lot of time and be very difficult to implement."* In this way, SEL can be integrated naturally into the main content of the curriculum. It will help reduce resistance to new courses but still ensure that SEL is integrated into the curriculum in a way that connects theory with practice, link SECs to academic learning, and encourages pre-service teachers to apply these skills in real, meaningful contexts.

Concerns were raised by FIPT05 and FIPT02 about the risk of SEL being perceived as merely theoretical if separated into its own course. They pointed out, *"If SEL is separated into its own course, pre-service teachers will treat it as just another subject they know about, but whether they apply it in practice would be 50-50."* This concern indicates the need to ensure that SEL is taught with an emphasis on practical application rather than just theoretical knowledge. Supporting this view, FIPT05 called for a gradual introduction of SEL courses: *"I think the process should first involve integrating its principles gradually into the training program. Once it becomes part of the university culture, we could fully introduce it as a separate course."* This step-by-step approach would help pre-service teachers recognize that SEL is a fundamental part of their training process and allow them to later pass it on to their future students.

In summary, integrating SEL into existing courses may be a more effective and feasible strategy to promote SEL in the EFL teacher training curriculum. This approach can address the challenges of introducing a new separate course such as limited time and credit constraints. It can also connect theoretical concepts with classroom practices and link SECs directly to academic learning. It also encourages pre-service teachers to apply these skills in real, meaningful contexts so that they clearly see the connection between SEL and effective classroom practice, and gain concrete examples and experiences that prepare them to integrate SEL into their own EFL classrooms in the future.

5.4.3.5. Introducing SEL early in training program

Pre-service EFL teachers also emphasized the value of introducing SEL early in their training to maximize its benefits. FIPT03 proposed: *"I think it should start with first-year pre-service teachers, right from the first semester. They need to learn about SECs so that they can have a clear plan for their four years at university: what they will do and what goals they have."* Early exposure to SEL would allow pre-service EFL teachers

to develop SECs as well as SEL instructional competence throughout their academic journey and better prepare for their future teaching roles.

5.4.3.6. Providing accessible and relevant materials for effective SEL teaching

Pre-service EFL teachers also stressed the importance of having accessible, high-quality resources to support SEL teaching. FIPT03 noted, *"I think SECs can be taught because there are many foreign resources on psychology, which is a well-developed field, that we can use to suit our English students. It's just that we haven't yet found the right content. If our department could research, introduce and provide this information to pre-service EFL teachers more openly, I think it would be successful. The important thing is that pre-service teachers need quality and easily accessible sources of information."* This emphasizes the need for departments to provide pre-service teachers with relevant resources such as research articles, teaching guides and case studies.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers expressed a strong need for more explicit and accessible SEL training. They advocated for dedicated SEL courses, more structured integration into existing subjects, mandatory inclusion, early introduction and accessible resources to promote SEL in teacher training. These suggestions reflect their awareness of the program's current limitations, but also a strong desire and a shared commitment to developing SECs and SEL instructional competence necessary for effective teaching and student holistic growth.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has thoroughly explored the perceptions of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers at VPU. The results show that the pre-service teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward SEL and recognize its multiple benefits for learners, teachers and the classroom climate. They also recognize the multiple roles of EFL teachers in not only delivering language instruction but also fostering students' SECs. However, their limited formal understanding and lack of preparedness reveal notable gaps in their training. These findings suggest that pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge of SEL is largely intuitive and experiential rather than derived from formal frameworks. Regarding the barriers to SEL implementation, lack of training and professional development is identified as the most significant. Additional challenges include time constraints, limited resources and resistance to new teaching methods. Finally, they advocate for more explicit, targeted SEL training and systemic support, including standalone courses, clearer integration into existing courses, mandatory inclusion and early introduction. These perceptions reflect the influence of the teacher education program: while the implicit approaches to SEL help pre-service teachers develop positive perceptions of SEL, they also result in fragmented knowledge and limited preparedness for intentional classroom practice.

CHAPTER 6: PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' PRACTICES IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

This chapter moves from perceptions to practices. It integrates the findings from the questionnaire, focus group, teacher trainer assessments and classroom observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of pre-service EFL teachers' practices in SEL in authentic learning and teaching situations. It first examines how they demonstrate the five core SECs, followed by how they practise SEL instructional competence, as well as the correlations between these competencies. Finally the chapter examines the relationships among the teacher education program, pre-service teachers' perception and practices of SEL.

6.1. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Practices of the Five Core SECs as Learners

Pre-service EFL teachers, while fulfilling their roles as learners in the teacher training program, are expected to demonstrate proficiency in the five core SECs: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. These competencies are important not only for their own personal and academic success but also for their future role as educators who must model and teach these skills. This section begins with an overall evaluation and then proceeds with a detailed analysis of each of the five core SECs in practices.

6.1.1. Overall assessments of pre-service EFL teachers' practices of SECs

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data indicate that pre-service EFL teachers' practices in the five core SECs are assessed as slightly above average or moderate-to-high, but not outstanding. They could demonstrate evidence of each of the five SECs, but their practices remain fragmented and uneven, with noticeable variation across broad competencies, specific skills and individual pre-service teachers.

Teacher trainers generally assessed the SECs of pre-service teachers as slightly above average or moderate-to-high, though the level of competency was not uniformly strong across the pre-service teachers. ITT02 shared her observations: *"In the courses I've taught, I find that the SECs of the pre-service teachers are slightly above average but not very strong."* This assessment implies that pre-service teachers generally demonstrate a foundational level of social-emotional competencies, but they have not yet reached a level of excellence. Similarly, ITT05 noted: *"I think there's a big range. There are some who are excellent, some who are poor, but in general, I would go somewhere in the middle, on the good side."* It means that only a few pre-service teachers excel, and most fall into the *"good but not outstanding"* range. ITT01's broader assessment, *"I think it's around average,"* further supports the view that SECs are generally around average but not yet fully developed among the pre-service teachers.

The descriptive statistics from the self-reported questionnaire on pre-service EFL teachers' SECs confirm the above qualitative finding in that most pre-service teachers self-assessed themselves as highly or moderately proficient in SECs, but not outstanding or very strong (4.50-5.00) in any particular competence (see Table 22). The mean scores for the different SECs range from 3.45 to 3.82 on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating that, on average, pre-service teachers report practicing these competencies at a moderate-to-high level. Specifically, the highest mean is recorded for social awareness at 3.83. and the lowest mean is for self-management at 3.45. These results align with the qualitative findings where teacher trainers described pre-service teachers' SECs as generally *"slightly above average"* or *"good, but not outstanding."*

Table 22
Descriptive Statistics of Pre-service EFL Teachers' Practices in five core SECs

Practices in SECs	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Self-awareness	3.60	1.40	5.00	3.6980	.59269
Self-management	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.4535	.60897
Social awareness	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.8256	.56399
Relationship skills	3.60	1.40	5.00	3.5983	.61029
Responsible decision-making	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7060	.58743

6.1.2. Pre-service EFL teachers' practices in Self-Awareness

This section explores the extent to which pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate self-awareness in their role as learners within the training program. It begins with an overall evaluation of their self-awareness and continues with a detailed examination of their practices across five specific skills: identifying and expressing emotions, recognizing personal interests and needs, acknowledging strengths and limitations, understanding personality and values, and fostering self-confidence and optimism.

Overall evaluation of pre-service EFL teachers' self-awareness

Pre-service EFL teachers' practices in self-awareness are generally high but uneven. They demonstrated strong reflective abilities in identifying emotions, recognizing interests and needs, and acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, but faced limitations in translating this reflection into confidence and optimism. FIPT11, for example, confidently rated their self-awareness as *"almost perfect."* FIPT12 and FIPT03 also rated themselves quite high *"four out of five"*. FIPT12 stated: *"I know who I am, what I want and where I am in life."* Similarly, FIPT02 reflected on their growing self-awareness: *"I've become more self-aware than I was in high school or my first year of university."* This progress illustrates how experiences contribute to the development of self-awareness over time.

Teacher trainers observed that pre-service EFL teachers tend to have higher levels of self-awareness compared to those from other disciplines. ITT04 noted, *"Their self-awareness seems stronger than pre-service teachers in other disciplines. They know clearly who they are, what their strengths and limitations are."* This ability allows them to set realistic goals that align with their personal and academic strengths. However, although they are generally aware of their limitations, many fail to take actionable steps to address their limitations. For instance, FIPT14 expressed difficulty in overcoming personal challenges: *"I realize that I need to solve my internal problems to improve myself, but I haven't found a solution."* This highlights a gap where self-awareness exists but actionable strategies for growth are lacking. Teacher training programs, therefore, need to provide additional support for pre-service teachers to translate self-awareness into actionable actionable strategies for growth.

The questionnaire data analysis results offer a quantitative overview of pre-service EFL teachers' self-awareness skills, as shown in Table 23. Pre-service teachers scored highest on identifying and expressing emotions (SEA1, M=3.87, SD=.757) and recognizing personal interests (SEA2, M=3.84, SD=.815). Recognizing strengths and limitations (SEA3. M=3.75, SD=.832) and identifying personality and values (SEA4, M=3.68, SD=.845) also received high scores. However, maintaining self-confidence and optimism (SEA5) had the lowest mean score (M=3.34, SD=.873).

Table 23
Descriptive Statistics of Self-awareness Skills

Self-awareness (SEA) skills	Mean	SD
SEA1. I can identify and express my emotions, moods and feelings.	3.87	.757
SEA2. I can recognise my personal interests and needs.	3.84	.815
SEA3. I can recognize my own strengths and limitations.	3.75	.832
SEA4. I can identify my own personality and values.	3.68	.845
SEA5. I can maintain a sense of self-confidence and optimism.	3.34	.873

The following sections will analyze classroom observation and interview data to assess how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate each of these self-awareness skills in practice.

SEA.1. Identify and express emotions, moods and feelings

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated quite strong skills in identifying and expressing emotions in various classroom activities. In a check-in before a presentation activity led by OTT05, they openly shared their feelings with responses like *"I feel not very confident"*; *"Shy, nervous"*; and *"Nervous, but try to be confident"*. Some expressed growing confidence: *"In the past, I was nervous, but now, it is OK."* This activity allowed them to articulate their emotions and promote greater emotional awareness before a high-pressure task. Classroom observations noted the pre-service EFL teachers' enthusiastic participation. They expressed their feelings openly, especially when they

were encouraged by OTT05's timely and empathetic responses. In another activity, which connected emotions to favorite songs, they freely described their feelings like "*happy*," "*sad*," or "*lonely*" and shared relatable lyrics. Through these activities, pre-service EFL teachers clearly demonstrated their ability and comfort in identifying and expressing emotions.

SEA.2. Recognize personal interests and needs

Pre-service EFL teachers effectively demonstrated self-awareness in recognizing and expressing their personal interests and needs, a skill essential for personal well-being and academic success. During a personalized attendance check-in, for example, they shared simple preferences like their favorite numbers: *"I pick 7 because it reminds me of my birthday month."* In another classroom activity, they were asked to pair their emotions with their favorite music. One pre-service teacher shared, *"I feel calm when I listen to RnB music; it helps me focus."* Another pre-service teacher expressed, *"Pop music makes me feel excited and ready to begin the day."* These responses highlighted the link between their personal interests and emotional lives.

Additionally, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated self-awareness through reflective practices, as seen in FIPT08's assessment of learning habits: *"I look at how I learn, what method works for me and what time of day is best to study."* Another pre-service teacher reflected on their preference for studying in a quiet environment: *"I realize I work best when it's silent, so I often study in the library or at home."* These proactive reflections allowed pre-service EFL teachers to identify strategies that support their academic success and ensure their emotional well-being. They are not only aware of their interests but also actively consider how these preferences impact their learning.

SEA.3. Recognize one's strengths and limitations

Pre-service EFL teachers also demonstrated strong self-awareness in recognizing their strengths and limitations. Firstly, focus group interview data show that pre-service EFL teachers openly acknowledged both their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, FIPT01 shared, *"I know where my strengths lie, where I'm weak and where I'm not good."* This illustrates a clear self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses. FIPT06 noted that self-awareness can depend on the situation: *"I'd rate myself 3.5; everyone knows their strengths and weaknesses, but honestly, it depends on the situation."*

Pre-service EFL teachers addressed their limitations in various ways. Some pre-service teachers, as one teacher trainer observed, *"have a plan to improve on these weaknesses"* [ITT04]. This included seeking support in specific areas like pronunciation or writing. However, some were more hesitant or unsure about how to overcome them. As FIPT03 reflected, *"Sometimes I know I'm not good at certain areas, but I don't really know what*

to do or where to start, so I just ignore them or simply accept them." In other words, for some pre-service teachers, self-awareness can lead to proactive efforts for improvement, but for some, even when they were aware of their limitations, they tended to ignore them or showed little motivation to take actions to overcome their limitations.

SEA.4. Identify one's own personality and values

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated self-awareness in identifying and expressing their personality traits and values through interactive classroom activities. In one exercise observed in OTT05's class, they introduced themselves with a personality trait beginning with the same letter as their name, accompanied by a corresponding action. For example, "Hoa" chose the word "Hardworking" and a suitable action to demonstrate her personality and value. This activity encouraged them to reflect on a characteristic they valued, fostering both self-awareness and confidence in expressing personal identity. The field note wrote, *"All the pre-service teachers were very eager, happy, attentive and enthusiastic. They could remember all the names, adjectives and demonstrative actions of all the pre-service teachers in their class."* This activity not only enhanced individual self-awareness but also built an inclusive learning community.

SEA.5. Maintain a sense of self-confidence and optimism

Pre-service teachers demonstrated their ability to maintain self-confidence and optimism during their learning process. In one discussion session [OTT01], for example, some pre-service teachers spoke *"clearly, loudly and confidently"*. In another session [OTT02], pre-service EFL teachers also exhibited confidence by *"elaborating on their ideas"* and *"enthusiastically expressing and defending their opinions."* Those who initially hesitated later *"volunteered to give and explain their opinions."* It means that practice and positive reinforcement could enhance their confidence. However, in OTT03's class, some pre-service teachers appeared *"not very confident,"* with voices that were *"not very clear and loud enough."* These fieldnotes illustrate varying confidence levels among pre-service teachers. A supportive classroom environment, with *"timely and kind responses from the teacher trainer,"* could foster this confidence and help pre-service teachers feel *"comfortable, confident, attentive and determined"* [OTT02].

In summary, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that pre-service EFL teachers actively demonstrated self-awareness in classroom activities. Quantitative scores reflect strengths in identifying and expressing one's emotions, values, strengths, limitations and personal interests, with high mean scores in these areas. Qualitative data support these findings and illustrate how pre-service EFL teachers openly shared emotions, articulated personal interests and assessed their strengths as well as weaknesses. However, some pre-service teachers had difficulties in translating this awareness into confidence,

optimism and practical steps for continuous improvement. In the context of EFL teacher education, this means that pre-service teachers may understand their needs and goals but hesitate to take take actions, monitor their learning and adjust their behaviors accordingly in order to achieve goals. These findings indicate the importance of supporting pre-service teachers in not just self-awareness but also in self-management.

6.1.3. Pre-service EFL teachers' practices in Self-Management

This section examines how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate self-management skills. It provides an overall evaluation and then looks into specific skills, including adapting to new situations, setting and achieving goals, overcoming challenges, resisting distractions, taking initiative and managing time effectively.

Overall evaluation of pre-service EFL teachers' self-management

EFL pre-service teachers display moderate self-management proficiency, with strengths in resilience and adaptability but weaknesses in goal-setting, time management and procrastination. This imbalance highlights a broader issue of self-regulation: pre-service teachers can exert effort in the short term but often fail to sustain long-term strategies, effort, discipline and consistency.

In the focus group interview, most pre-service teachers rated their self-management as moderate to low. Many admitted that they have trouble with time management due to procrastination and inappropriate prioritization. For instance, FIPT03 rated their self-management at level 2 and explained: *"I set goals but I tend to procrastinate and only start working on them when the deadline comes closer."* This statement reflects a common challenge of delaying important tasks until the last minute. Similarly, FIPT06 rated themselves between 2-2.5 and explained: *"I manage time very poorly. I spend too much time on unimportant things and little on what actually needs to be done."* FIPT08 also had this problem: *"I know self-management is important, but I still don't manage myself properly. I know my schedule is not right, but I don't make changes."* This recurring theme of poor time management was evident in other responses. By contrast, FIPT04 rated his self-management at quite a high level: *"I think my self-management skills are now at level 4, but I've only recently achieved this level."*

The questionnaire data (see Table 24) supports and expands the focus group interview. The avearge scores indicate moderate performance in self-management skills, with mean scores ranging from 3.34 to 3.56 across six specific skills. Pre-service EFL teachers showed moderate competence in adapting to new situations (SEM1, M=3.46) and overcoming challenges (SEM3. M=3.46), though issues like procrastination and balancing discipline persist. Goal-setting (SEM2, M=3.34) was rated as a big challenge as some pre-service teachers often fail to maintain discipline and follow their set goals.

The highest score was in resisting distractions (SEM4, M=3.56); however, qualitative data reveal that maintaining focus remains difficult for some pre-service teachers. Although they showed initiative and engagement in classroom tasks (SEM5, M=3.50), they sometimes lacked accountability in group work. Finally, time management (SEM6, M=3.39) also posed great challenges.

Table 24

Descriptive Statistics of Self-management Skills

Self-management (SEM) skills	Mean	SD
SEM1. I can adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations.	3.46	.780
SEM2. I can set, adapt and evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life.	3.34	.790
SEM3. I can embrace and overcome challenges in study & life.	3.46	.854
SEM4. I can resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize my goals.	3.56	.849
SEM5. I can take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks.	3.50	.810
SEM6. I can effectively manage time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality.	3.39	.890

The following subsections will provide detailed classroom observation and interview data to illustrate how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated each of these self-management skills in practice.

SEM.1. Adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations

Classroom observations and focus group interview provide evidence of how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated their ability to adapt their thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to challenging situations. One prominent instance was observed during presentations. Despite visible nervousness, some pre-service teachers managed to maintain focus and complete their tasks. In OTT02's classroom, it was observed that *"Some pre-service teachers seemed to be nervous but they tried their best to talk about their product; they could still accomplish their tasks successfully with the praise of the others. They even came out of their seats, stepped out in the center of the classroom and talked about their teaching model even though they were shaking due to being too nervous."* This instance illustrates how the pre-service teachers recognized their emotions such as anxiety, but were able to regulate them and adapt their behaviors to meet the demands of the situation.

Another instance of emotional adaptability was seen in group work activities. When faced with challenges such as group members submitting low-quality or late work, one pre-service teacher chose not to react with frustration but instead offered support. FIPT01 recalled: *"I could get angry, but I thought it could ruin friendships. I thought, okay, that's their level and then I offered some resources and suggestions to help them do better."* This response highlights FIPT01's emotional intelligence in regulating his own emotions to manage interpersonal relationships effectively.

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SEM.2. Set, adapt and evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life

Classroom observations showed pre-service EFL teachers' ability to set clear objectives: *"They had prepared very carefully for their presentation"* [OTT01] and *"tried their best to meet the criteria and design the teaching aid, which is beautiful, meaningful, relevant, useful, economic and time-saving for the warm-up session of a lesson"* [OTT02]. These fieldnotes illustrate how pre-service teachers set and pursued specific goals and assessed their efforts against established criteria to achieve desired outcomes.

However, procrastination and lack of persistence emerged as common challenges. FIPT02 admitted, *"I can make a list of tasks that I need to do, but then, I start thinking I can do it tomorrow.'"* In other words, pre-service EFL teachers admitted that their plans can be easily delayed. FIPT04 similarly noted how procrastination affects goal-setting: *"I set goals but then delay and don't achieve them."* These reflections emphasize the importance of persistence in self-management and highlight how procrastination can affect the achievement of goals even though they are well-set.

SEM.3. I can embrace and overcome challenges in study & life

Embracing and overcoming challenges is an important component of self-management and pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying abilities in this area. A notable example of pre-service teachers embracing and overcoming challenges was their thorough preparation for group presentations. In OTT02, it was observed that *"All the groups had prepared for the situation and solution very well at home. They worked hard together to draw their poster to show their model of a happy class and dream school."* This demonstrated that pre-service EFL teachers anticipated potential obstacles related to collaboration, content development and presentation skills.

Another instance was observed when some pre-service teachers overcame anxiety and stress during presentations. In OTT02, some pre-service teachers displayed visible nervousness but still completed their tasks successfully. It was noted that *"Some pre-service teachers seemed to be nervous but they tried their best to talk about their product; they could still accomplish their tasks successfully with the praise of the other pre-service teachers."* This highlights how pre-service teachers were able to overcome negative emotions such as anxiety and continue to perform under pressure. Furthermore, the fact that some pre-service EFL teachers were willing to *"step out in the center of the classroom and talk about their teaching model even though they were shaking due to being too nervous"* reflects their determination to confront emotional barriers in order to achieve academic success.

SEM.4. Resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize goals

Resisting inappropriate social pressures is an essential aspect of self-management. Several pre-service teachers reflected on their challenges with distractions that prevent them from fully realizing their goals. For example, FIPT13 shared, *"I tell myself to study at this time to pass a certification, but I still can't manage it. I get distracted by other factors."* FIPT06 also shared her challenges in resisting distractions and maintaining focus on her goals: "*I often write down the things I need to achieve, but I only accomplish about half of them. That's because I'm tempted by difficulties.*" These reflections reveal a common challenge among pre-service teachers: setting goals but being unable to resist distractions, leading to incomplete tasks and unfulfilled academic goals.

Despite these self-reported challenges, classroom observations reveal instances where pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated strong self-management by resisting distractions and focusing on their goals. In OTT05, many pre-service teachers exhibited high levels of concentration during their group tasks: *"All the members tried to save time; they didn't want to waste any minute; they wanted to prepare very carefully for their presentation. They tried their best. All of the groups and members focused on their task; none were distracted. They worked very hard."* This instance illustrates how these pre-service teachers resisted potential distractions and stayed focused on their academic tasks.

However, not all pre-service EFL teachers managed to resist distractions effectively. In OTT01's classroom, some were observed to be disengaged during a presentation: *"Some pre-service teachers did not pay attention to the presentation; they worked on their laptop to prepare for their upcoming presentations; some were on their phones, doing something else; some were talking softly."* Similarly, in OTT03's classroom, it was noted that *"Some pre-service EFL teachers didn't pay attention to the lessons; they did something on their computer or smartphone; they talked to one another; they worked on the textbooks; they prepared for their upcoming presentation."* These behaviors indicate that certain pre-service EFL teachers failed to resist social distractions, which negatively impacted their ability to stay engaged in academic tasks.

SEM.5. Take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks

Classroom observations reveal that many pre-service teachers demonstrated strong self-regulation skills and showed initiative and positive motivation in their academic tasks. For example, in OTT02's classroom, pre-service teachers were described as "*very eager, attentive, hard-working, proactive, willing, enthusiastic about the content/activities of the lesson.*" This level of engagement demonstrates their ability to take initiative, fully engage themselves in the learning process and actively contribute to the lesson.

In addition, pre-service EFL teachers' motivation and optimism were notable during their work on teaching aids, as seen in OTT02's classroom: *"The pre-service teachers*

were very eager and enthusiastic about their teaching aids. They had designed their teaching aids very carefully and spent a lot of time on their work." This illustrates that when the pre-service teachers are motivated and believe in the value of their efforts, they can dedicate time and energy to producing high-quality teaching aids. Similarly, in OTT04's classroom, many pre-service teachers were observed *"working hard, attentively and enthusiastically; they tried their best to design a good lesson plan so that in the next period they could deliver a good lesson."* These observations show that pre-service EFL teachers invested a lot of effort in their assigned tasks.

However, some pre-service teachers couldn't demonstrate their initiative and engagement, especially in group activities. ITT02 noted: *"Some pre-service EFL teachers are quite irresponsible with their studies,"* and *"some are reluctant to participate in group activities."* This highlights an area of concern for pre-service EFL teachers who may lack the necessary engagement and accountability required for effective collaborative work. Similarly, in OTT03's classroom, it was observed that *"None of the pre-service teachers volunteered to ask questions or participated in the discussion. They didn't willingly, automatically, actively or eagerly ask questions related to the lesson."* They were also described as wasting time before starting their reports and producing poorly designed presentations due to a lack of initiative: *"They wasted a lot of time before they could start their report; they were not very happy and willing to report their project."*

Unfortunately, OTT03 did not provide any reminders, encouragement or clear expectations to guide or motivate the pre-service teachers throughout these activities. There was no visible attempt to redirect participation or set standards for collaboration and presentation. This overlook or ignorance means missed opportunities to activate and foster SECs for pre-service teachers. When compared with OTT02 and OTT05, a contrary pattern emerges. These trainers consistently and actively promoted students to practise SECs in various meaningful learning activities. This contrary pattern illustrates the powerful influence teacher trainers have in shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices in SEL.

In short, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying levels of initiative and engagement. Many pre-service EFL teachers showed a willingness to take the lead in their academic tasks; however, there was still a significant proportion of pre-service teachers who failed to manage themselves to stay engaged in the learning process.

SEM.6. Manage time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality

Regarding time-management, some pre-service teachers demonstrated strong skills; however, many faced problems such as procrastination and poor prioritization. During classroom observations, pre-service teachers were seen to be highly attentive and diligent

in their learning tasks. In OTT05's classroom, for instance, it was noted that "*all the members tried to save time; they didn't want to waste any minute; they wanted to prepare well for their presentation.*" This instance shows a strong commitment to time management among the observed pre-service teachers. They concentrated on their work and used their time efficiently to ensure high-quality learning products.

According to teacher trainers' assessment, pre-service teachers who demonstrated strong self-management skills were characterized by their punctuality in many aspects. ITT04 emphasized that pre-service teachers with good academic performance are "*usually very punctual in meetings, submitting assignments and meeting the academic requirements of their instructors. They also have the ability to self-research.*" This observation highlights that strong self-management is visible through punctuality, independent handling of tasks, taking the initiative to meet deadlines and engaging proactively in their learning processes.

Despite these positive examples, the focus group interview reveals significant challenges in time management among many pre-service teachers. FIPT13. for example, reflected on their problems with time management: "*Managing time, work or scheduling is really not appropriate. I know it's not appropriate, but I still don't fix it.*" This quote highlights a common issue where pre-service teachers recognize their time management problems but fail to take corrective actions. Similarly, FIPT04 admitted to inconsistent time management: "*I think I can manage my time, but I only manage important things very strictly, not things that are less important.*" This highlights a tendency among some pre-service teachers to focus only on high-priority academic tasks but neglect other areas. This imbalance can lead to overall inefficiency in managing different aspects of their study and life.

FIPT05 also admitted the issue of procrastination and external distractions: "*I don't manage my time well. Besides study, I take on a lot of part-time jobs. If there's group work or personal assignments, I only start them close to the deadline.*" Likewise, FIPT07 rated herself poorly: "*My time management is terrible; I spend too much time on useless things that have little benefit and too little time on important tasks.*" This quote emphasizes the negative consequences of failing to prioritize academic responsibilities, which leads to incomplete tasks and diminished academic performance.

In summary, the qualitative data confirms the quantitative findings that pre-service EFL teachers, in general, possess moderate self-management skills. They generally can adapt to the surrounding environments, set goals, overcome challenges, show enthusiasm and engagement in tasks. However, many pre-service EFL teachers failed to overcome procrastination, maintain discipline, resist distractions, stay committed to the set goals and manage time.

6.1.4. Pre-service EFL teachers' practices in Social-Awareness

Social-awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with others, recognize social cues and manage diverse social situations. This analysis first provides a comprehensive evaluation of pre-service EFL teachers' overall social-awareness, and then explores how they demonstrated specific social-awareness skills within their professional learning.

Overall evaluation of pre-service EFL teachers' social-awareness

In the focus group interview, pre-service EFL teachers assessed their social-awareness at differing levels. Some expressed strong confidence in their social-awareness skills. For example, FIPT03 mentioned, *"I would rate this ability quite high, around 4 or more."* This quote means that FIPT03 could easily perceive and respond to the emotions, needs and perspectives of others. Similarly, FIPT07 confidently rated her social-awareness very high at *"4.95."* By contrast, FIPT05 recognized limitations in his social-awareness skills, admitting: *"I don't think I'm good at social awareness."*

The quantitative findings (see Table 25) align with the qualitative data discussed above. The highest mean score (M=4.09) is reported for SOA2, which reflects the ability to recognize strengths and weaknesses of others. Similarly, SOA4, which measures respect for others, has a relatively high mean score (M=3.85). High mean scores are also recorded for SOA3 (M=3.77) and SOA5 (M=3.74), which assess the ability to understand others' perspectives and appreciate diversity, respectively. The lowest mean score (M=3.67) is found in SOA1, which measures the ability to understand and empathize with others' feelings. Although this score is still high, it suggests that pre-service teachers may find empathizing with others slightly more challenging compared to other aspects of social awareness. The standard deviations for all the five skills, ranging from .724 to .805, suggest moderate variations among pre-service teachers.

Table 25
Descriptive Statistics of Social-Awareness Skills

Social-awareness (SOA) skills	Mean	SD
SOA1. I can understand how others feel and empathize with them.	3.67	.744
SOA2. I can recognize other people's strengths and weaknesses.	4.09	.805
SOA3. I can understand other perspectives.	3.77	.724
SOA4. I respect others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints).	3.85	.781
SOA5. I appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities and differences.	3.74	.759

These findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers exhibited high competence in social-awareness, especially in recognizing others' strengths and weaknesses and showing respect for peers' viewpoints. However, they were less competent in empathizing with others' emotions and in fully appreciating diversity. The following subsections will focus on how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated each of specific social-awareness skills.

SOA.1. I can understand how others feel and empathize with them

In the focus group interview, pre-service teachers self-assessed their ability to understand and empathize with others at quite a high level. For example, FIPT06 reflected on his ability to perceive and interpret others' emotional states: *"I'm quite open-minded, ... and I'm quick to read their emotions."* Another pre-service teacher shared their development in becoming more understanding and less judgmental: *"In the past, I was quite judgmental and liked to evaluate others, but now I realize that they have their own values and backgrounds"* [FIPT04]. This statement indicates a significant growth of social-awareness as the pre-service teacher now values diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

FIPT07 described his strong capacity for empathy: *"I can easily put myself in others' shoes, empathize with them and sometimes even feel their pain as if it were my own."* FIPT01 shared his experience of managing group work empathetically when his group members submitted low-quality work. Instead of reacting with frustration, FIPT01 chose to empathize and offer help: *"I could get angry, but I think that would ruin friendships. I think, okay, that's their level and then I offer some resources and suggestions to help them do better."* This response demonstrates a high level of social-awareness, which enables FIPT01 to maintain harmony and provide help, even in frustrating situations.

Despite these positive self-assessments of social-awareness, some teacher trainers noted that pre-service teachers' social awareness often lacked depth. ITT04 reflected: *"They seem to pay attention to surface-level social interactions; I don't see a deep concern or sharing with others."* Another concern raised by teacher trainers was a degree of indifference that some pre-service teachers displayed toward broader social issues or the personal circumstances of their peers. ITT04 remarked, *"I notice that many of them are quite indifferent and detached from social circumstances, as well as from sharing and empathizing with their own classmates."* However, when prompted to address specific issues, they showed increased empathy: *"...but when someone brings these issues to their attention, it seems that they express a desire to share, to encourage and to contribute something to change the difficult circumstances of their peers"* [ITT04]. It can be implied that social-awareness can be nurtured through guidance or instruction.

Classroom observations show that pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated empathy with their peers who appeared nervous in challenging situations like presentation. An observation fieldnote recorded: *"Some pre-service teachers seemed to be nervous, but they could still accomplish their tasks successfully with the praise of their classmates"* [OTT02]. This instance demonstrates how pre-service teachers supported each other by offering praise and encouragement to lessen anxiety and foster a positive, inclusive environment. In another classroom observation, they were observed helping a peer prepare for a micro-teaching session: *"When a pre-service teacher came to the board to get ready for their micro-teaching, others helped her prepare for the lesson. They did so*

voluntarily, willingly, immediately, spontaneously and habitually" [OTT02]. This spontaneous willingness to support one another highlights the pre-service teachers' recognition of their peers' needs and their preparedness to assist.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated various levels of social-awareness, from understanding and empathizing with others' emotions to providing constructive support when needed; however, some pre-service EFL teachers just exhibited surface-level social awareness. These findings suggest that teacher training programs should provide structured opportunities to deepen social-awareness, which will enable pre-service teachers to foster more meaningful connections.

SOA.2. I can recognize other people's strengths and weaknesses

Recognizing others' strengths and weaknesses is an important skill of social-awareness. Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated this skill in several instances. One prominent example is when FIPT03 discussed their experience of working in groups: *"When working in groups, you know how to divide tasks properly, but you also know that some people will definitely do poorly, so you might choose to do it yourself"* [FIPT03]. This response indicates their ability to assess strengths and weaknesses of others, which enables them to make strategic decisions to ensure the group's overall success. Similarly, FIPT06 also acknowledged his capacity to quickly recognize others' strengths and weaknesses: *"I can easily recognize others' strengths and weaknesses."*

However, not all pre-service teachers found this skill easy to apply. FIPT05 admitted to having difficulty in recognizing others' strengths: "*I don't think I'm good at social awareness. Many times, I can't figure out what my friend is good at; I only see a part of what they show."* This difficulty in fully understanding the abilities of peers can hinder collaboration as it limits their ability to distribute tasks effectively or maximize the potential contributions their peers might offer.

In classroom observations, pre-service teachers demonstrated their ability to recognize strengths and weaknesses during peer feedback sessions. In one instance, they were *"assessing and giving scores to their peers' warm-up activities. They were open, honest when making comments on the warm-up activity; they also shared ideas about how to make the activity better"* [OTT02]. The feedback included comments like, *"Your warm-up activity is too long; you should have focused more on the topic or content related to the lesson only"* and *"Your warm-up is very impressive"* [OTT02]. These examples show that they were capable of identifying both strengths and limitations in their peers' work.

In short, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying degrees of social-awareness in recognizing others' strengths and weaknesses. Some are good at identifying the abilities of their peers; however, others faced challenges in fully understanding their peers.

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SOA.3. I can understand other people's perspectives

Understanding different perspectives is an essential aspect of social awareness. Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying degrees of this skill in both classroom interactions and self-reflections. FIPT06 acknowledged his difficulty in adopting others' viewpoints: *"But I'm lacking in seeing life from others' perspectives."* This reflection highlights the challenge that some pre-service teachers face in fully understanding other people's perspectives.

In contrast, classroom observations reveal instances where pre-service teachers interacted effectively with different perspectives. For example, pre-service EFL teachers actively participated in group discussions where *"they openly and enthusiastically expressed and defended their ideas"* [OTT05]. This suggests that pre-service teachers were not only aware of other viewpoints but they were also willing to participate in meaningful dialogue and demonstrated their openness to diverse perspectives. Additionally, they were observed giving constructive feedback during peer assessments. In one session, *"pre-service teachers were very open, honest when making comments on the warm-up activity; they also shared ideas about how to make the activity better"* [OTT02]. This exchange of feedback indicates that pre-service EFL teachers were capable of understanding their peers' perspectives, identifying strengths and limitations and offering thoughtful suggestions.

During presentations, pre-service EFL teachers further showcased their ability to address others' perspectives effectively. One presenter *"spoke very confidently and fluently about the topic. She asked the whole class some interactive questions related to the content of her presentation"* to encourage her peers to contribute their ideas. *"The other pre-service EFL teachers were willing to answer the questions and contributed ideas to the presentation"* [OTT02]. The MC was described as *"very confident and could lead the report session very effectively."* He ensured that all pre-service EFL teachers had a chance to participate by calling on them when no one volunteered: *"If no one raised a hand, he would inform the whole class of the list of pre-service EFL teachers who needed to make questions successively."* This instance reflects a collaborative learning environment where different viewpoints were valued and integrated into the discussion.

However, not all pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated this skill consistently. In another session, it was observed that *"None of the pre-service EFL teachers volunteered to ask questions or participated in the discussion"* [OTT03]. The lack of active participation could reflect discomfort or difficulty in understanding different viewpoints. However, the reluctance to participate might not solely result from the pre-service EFL teachers' lack of social-awareness but could also indicate that the EFL teacher trainers did not effectively model, encourage or guide the pre-service EFL teachers to participate in discussions or appreciate diverse perspectives. Therefore, teacher trainers need to

demonstrate SECs like empathy, active listening and inclusive communication, and also provide strategies to encourage these behaviors among pre-service EFL teachers.

In conclusion, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying levels of social-awareness, especially in their ability to understand and respond to different perspectives. Some pre-service EFL teachers actively participated in discussions, offered constructive feedback and facilitated inclusive environments; however, others failed to demonstrate empathy and active engagement. It is also important to note that teacher trainers play a significant role in this process.

SOA.4. I respect others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints)

Respecting others, especially by listening attentively and acknowledging diverse perspectives, is also an important component of social-awareness that pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated in various classroom settings. For example, in OTT02's classroom, *"pre-service teachers were very open, honest when making comments on the warm-up activity; they also shared ideas about how to make the activity better."* This behavior reflects not only active participation but also a genuine respect for others' efforts and ideas.

High levels of respect were also evident during interactive discussions, where pre-service teachers showed enthusiasm to interact with their peers. In OTT05's classroom, many pre-service EFL teachers were described as *"quite active and proactive in raising questions to the presenter,"* and even *"raising their hand as fast as possible to get the right to answer the questions."* This eagerness to participate and contribute reflects a strong sense of involvement and mutual respect. Pre-service EFL teachers not only listened to the presenter but also took an active role in questioning and deepening the discussion: *"Sometimes the discussions turned into a debate between the audience and the presenter"* [OTT02]. Such debates reflect respect for others' opinions as pre-service EFL teachers had to carefully listen, consider opposing views and articulate their responses thoughtfully.

However, there were instances where respect for others, especially through active listening, was not consistently demonstrated. In OTT03's classroom, it was observed that *"some pre-service teachers didn't pay attention to the lessons; they did something else on their laptop or smartphone; they talked to one another; they worked on the textbooks; they prepared for their upcoming presentation."* This lack of attention during others' presentations suggests that respect for peers was not fully maintained in certain situations. Moreover, *"a few pre-service teachers sat at the corner and didn't contribute much to the discussion."* This observation highlights a need for strategies to ensure that all pre-service EFL teachers are equally involved in all classroom activities.

In general, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated respect for others through active listening and participation in discussions. Their willingness to provide constructive feedback, participate in debates and address diverse perspectives showcases a strong foundation in social-awareness. However, the inconsistent demonstration of respect in some cases suggests that more inclusive strategies are needed to get all pre-service EFL teachers fully involved.

SOA.5. I appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities and differences

Appreciating diversity involves recognizing and valuing both similarities and differences among individuals or groups. Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated this social-awareness skill during an activity in the English Speaking Cultures and Countries course led by OTT03, where they presented about one country and its cultural identities. Then, a whole class discussion was held to compare these identities and identify both similarities and differences. Throughout this activity, they demonstrated their curiosity, respect and their ability to appreciate the cultural uniqueness of each country. The fieldnote recorded, *"Most of the pre-service teachers were actively engaged. They made meaningful comparisons between the cultural identities of their own country and those they had learned about; they showed great interest in the diversity of these cultures."* This fieldnote illustrates how pre-service EFL teachers not only acknowledged differences but also valued them. *"However, a few pre-service teachers were quite passive and reluctant. They simply agreed with what was shared without offering new ideas or asking further questions"* [OTT03].

During the focus group interview, one pre-service teacher remarked, *"I learned a lot from my classmates because they think differently. Their ideas are sometimes so different from mine, but I see how we complement each other"* [FIPT07]. Similarly, FIPT05 remarked:*"I realized that my friends and I have very different ways of solving problems. At first, I thought my way was better, but after hearing their ideas, I saw how their solutions had its own strengths. It taught me to appreciate different methods."* In other words, pre-service EFL teachers recognize that differences in thinking can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of any issue.

Moreover, pre-service teachers demonstrated a growing appreciation for diversity by recognizing how different backgrounds influence individuals. In the focus group interview, one pre-service teacher mentioned: *"In the past, I was quick to judge others, but now I realize that everyone has their own values and backgrounds. I try to understand their backgrounds before forming an opinion"* [FIPT04]. This reflection illustrates how the pre-service teacher has developed a more inclusive mindset to acknowledge that people's backgrounds and experiences shape their perspectives and behaviors. Recognizing these differences and valuing them as part of a diverse classroom environment is an essential step in fostering empathy and respect.

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In summary, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying levels of social-awareness. They could showcase their ability to empathize with peers, recognize individual strengths and weaknesses and appreciate diversity. However, not all pre-service EFL teachers could demonstrate these skills; some pre-service teachers showed reluctance, indifference and a lack of depth in their social awareness. These findings suggest that further training opportunities are needed to help pre-service EFL teachers deepen their social-awareness and engage all pre-service EFL teachers in the process.

6.1.5. Pre-service EFL teachers' practices in Relationship Skills

Relationship skills are essential components of SEL, especially for future educators like pre-service EFL teachers. Effective relationship skills enable them to build strong, positive connections with students, colleagues and other stakeholders to enhance the learning environment. This section explores the relationship skills of pre-service EFL teachers by evaluating their general abilities and then assessing each of the specific skills.

Overall evaluation of pre-service EFL teachers' relationship skills

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying levels of relationship skills. For instance, FIPT04 reported high confidence in his relationship-building abilities: *"I rate myself 5/5."* In contrast, other pre-service teachers rated themselves more modestly in this area. FIPT06, for example, stated, *"I rate myself 3.5."* FIPT03 rated themselves even lower: "*I would give myself only 3.0 points."* These statements suggest that pre-service EFL teachers self-assess their relationship skills at different levels.

EFL teacher trainers generally observed that pre-service EFL teachers exhibit strong social and relationship skills: *Perhaps thanks to the nature of their studies, participating in a lot of group work and communication activities, their social awareness and ability to build and maintain relationships are better"* [ITT04]. This observation highlights how the structure of the EFL teacher education program, which emphasizes group work and social interactions, can effectively develop pre-service EFL teachers' relationship skills.

Table 26 shows quantitative self-assessments of the relationship skills across five specific skills. The mean scores indicate that pre-service EFL teachers generally assessed their skills as high. The highest-rated skill is seeking or offering help when needed (RES5, M=3.69). This is closely followed by their ability to identify the purpose, content, and attitude required for effective communication (RES2, M=3.68) and building and maintaining relationships with diverse individuals (RES1, M=3.64). Group work and cooperation (RES3. M=3.61) also scored highly. The lowest score is for managing interpersonal conflicts constructively (RES4, M=3.38). It means that pre-service EFL teachers feel less proficient in preventing, managing and resolving interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

Table 26

Descriptive Statistics of Relationship Skills

Relationship skills (RES)	Mean	SD
RES1. I can build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals.	3.64	.909
RES2. I can identify the purpose, content, means & attitude required for effective communication.	3.68	.854
RES3. I can work and learn well in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.	3.61	.770
RES4. I can prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.	3.38	.819
RES5. I can seek or offer help and resources when needed.	3.69	.823

Standard deviations, which range from .770 to .909, indicate low to moderate variations among pre-service EFL teachers. There is a general consensus among pre-service teachers on strengths such as seeking help (RES5) and effective communication (RES2). However, greater variations in relationship-building (RES1, SD=.909) and conflict resolution (RES4, SD=.819) indicate that some pre-service teachers may feel much less confident in these skills than others. These quantitative findings align with qualitative data in that both set of data reveal strengths in collaboration (RES5, M=3.69) but difficulties in trust and conflict management (RES4, M=3.38).

Overall, the triangulated data reveal that pre-service EFL teachers display moderate-to-strong practices in relationship skills, especially in collaboration, teamwork and communication; however, they were less competent in initiating new relationships, resolving conflicts and seeking support when needed, suggesting that they need further support or training in this skill. In the following sections, the analysis focuses on examining specific relationship skills.

RES.1. I can build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals

Building and maintaining relationships with diverse groups and individuals is essential in educational settings. The focus group interview with pre-service EFL teachers reveal both strengths and challenges in this skill. Several pre-service teachers expressed difficulties in starting conversations and forming relationships with people they don't know well. For example, FIPT05 admitted, *"I'm weak in starting a relationship. I have trouble initiating conversations or starting relationships with someone, especially with strangers."* Similarly, FIPT07 stated: *"I don't know how to start a conversation, especially with people I've just met."*

Contrary to pre-service EFL teachers' self-assessment, EFL teacher trainers reported that pre-service EFL teachers are quite proactive in establishing relationships with other people. For example, ITT04 noted, *"I can see that pre-service EFL teachers are quite proactive in establishing new relationships. Because they have good foreign language skills, they not only have relationships with Vietnamese peers but also with international*

students and lecturers or foreign experts who come to the university to work and study." This highlights how language proficiency enables pre-service EFL teachers to connect with diverse individuals, widen their social networks and enhance their cultural competence. Their willingness to interact with international students and experts reflects an openness to diversity and a commitment to forming relationships with different groups of people from different cultures around the world.

In classroom settings, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated the ability to work collaboratively and maintain positive interactions within their peer groups. Observations reveal that they *"worked collaboratively"* [OTT01] and were often seen helping each other: *"Some pre-service teachers volunteered to assist their classmates in setting up the presentation materials before the session began"* [OTT02]. Even during break times, *"pre-service teachers remained in their groups and continued their discussions on their tasks"* [OTT05]. In addition, *"they effectively communicated and supported one another to ensure that each member understood their task and contributed equally to the group's success"* [OTT02]. These practices reflect their ability to form supportive relationships and contribute to a friendly classroom environment.

In summary, although pre-service EFL teachers face challenges in initiating relationships with unfamiliar individuals, their proactive use of language skills and ability to collaborate and support their peers showcase their potential to develop strong, diverse relationships. Through continued practice and targeted support in overcoming initial barriers, they can enhance their relationship-building skills.

RES.2. I can identify the purpose, content, means and attitude required for effective communication

Effective communication is essential to building and maintaining relationships. Some pre-service teachers displayed strong confidence in their communication skills. For instance, FIPT04 expressed this confidence: *"I feel my communication skills are good; I know how to listen and respond."* Others, like FIPT02, acknowledged gradual improvement in their communication skills: *"I think my communication skills have improved; I've learned how to talk to others."* Similarly, FIPT03 reflected positively on her progress: *"I think my communication skills have improved a lot compared to before."* This improvement indicates the potential for pre-service EFL teachers to overcome initial challenges and build more effective communication skills over time.

However, some pre-service teachers identified specific areas of communication they still found challenging. FIPT01 highlighted the importance of improving listening skills: *"Listening is an essential skill that I still need to improve."* Conversely, FIPT05 expressed challenges in articulating ideas, especially in larger group settings: *"I often get*

flustered when trying to express my ideas, especially in front of many people." Public speaking is a common challenge for many people, but it is essential for pre-service EFL teachers to overcome this barrier because they will need to communicate clearly and confidently in front of students.

FIPT01 also mentioned discomfort with superficial interactions: *"I don't really like interacting with many people and I don't like meaningless conversations because they are very boring to me."* This reflection suggests that FIPT01 focused on the purpose of the conversation. Adapting communication styles to different individuals also proved challenging for some pre-service EFL teachers. FIPT07 admitted, *"Sometimes it's hard to adjust my communication style to suit different people."* This challenge reflects the complexity of communication in diverse environments, where pre-service EFL teachers must modify their language, tone and methods to suit different situations.

In classroom observations, pre-service EFL teachers were seen practicing these communication skills during presentations and group activities. For example, *"The presenters tried to interact with the audience by asking some interactive questions or asked the audience to read some parts of the contents on the slides they had prepared. The audience (pre-service EFL teachers) were willing to get involved in the presentation"* [OTT01]. These interactions show that pre-service EFL teachers were not only expressing their ideas but also encouraging the audience to build an environment of active engagement for effective communication.

However, there were instances where communication could have been improved. Some pre-service EFL teachers could not attract the attention of the whole class: *"they presented not very loudly enough to catch the attention of the whole class; their eye contact was not good and frequent; their voice was soft; they didn't interact much with the audience"* [OTT03]. To sum up, some pre-service EFL teachers possess good communication skills; however, others need to practice more to ensure that their messages are conveyed effectively in communication.

RES.3. I can work and learn well in groups, taking on different roles and cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome

Working effectively in groups is an essential relationship skill for pre-service EFL teachers as it reflects the collaborative nature of language learning and teaching. The focus group interview and classroom observations reveal both strengths and challenges in how pre-service EFL teachers work in groups or teams.

Several pre-service teachers admitted having difficulty with group work management, especially when it came to unequal participation or contribution. For example, FIPT01 shared frustration about group members who always rely on others: *"When we do*

teamwork, they often rely on others; they won't do anything because they believe the team will do the task for them." FIPT04 also expressed frustration over the lack of fairness in group work: "*Some members work very hard, but others don't contribute much and still get high marks.*" Similarly, FIPT05 expressed annoyance at having to carry most of the workload: "*I feel really annoyed when I have to carry most of the work in the group.*" It is notable that although they are aware of the problems, they hestitate to take actions to resolve them.

The negative effect of unequal participation was highlighted by FIPT06: "*If everyone doesn't contribute equally, in the end, only a few people learn and the others don't improve.*" This unequal distribution of effort is a common challenge in group work, which not only causes frustration but also limits the learning opportunities for weaker members. This issue was reinforced by FIPT02: "*The stronger members have to do the work to get the team a high score, and then the strong stay strong and the weak remain weak.*" These perspectives emphasize the importance of equitable participation in group tasks to ensure that all members benefit from the collaborative learning experience.

Teacher trainers also reported that some pre-service teachers tended to avoid group activities. For example, ITT02 pointed out that "*there are some pre-service teachers who do not like participating in group activities and some who only focus on developing their own abilities without paying attention to the collective development of the group.*" Another concern raised by the teacher trainers is the variation across different levels of study, with junior pre-service EFL teachers appearing more collaborative than senior ones. ITT05 observed: "*The younger pre-service EFL teachers seem to be more supportive of each other while the older seem to want to work more independently.*" This tendency toward independence among older pre-service EFL teachers may reflect their increasing focus on self-reliance as they prepare for graduation, but it also highlights the need to balance independence with effective teamwork.

However, teacher trainers generally observed strong teamwork skills among pre-service EFL teachers. ITT04 noted that "*compared to pre-service teachers in other disciplines, pre-service EFL teachers have better group work skills. They have the ability to cooperate with others, share, contribute ideas and jointly discuss a study plan.*" This observation may suggest that the collaborative nature of the EFL teacher education curriculum has helped pre-service EFL teachers develop strong relationship skills.

In contrast to the challenges raised in the interviews, classroom observation data show that some pre-service EFL teachers displayed quite good collaborative skills. In OTT02's classroom, for example, pre-service EFL teachers worked diligently in their groups: "*The six groups had worked within their groups for one week and prepared carefully for delivering their warm-up activity.*" This level of preparation and commitment indicates strong cooperation and a shared goal of success. Similarly, in OTT05's classroom, "*all*

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members of the groups got involved in the discussion. They argued, gave their opinions, shared their ideas, defended their viewpoints, took notes, drew mind maps and diagrams." This active engagement showcases the pre-service EFL teachers' ability to work together effectively.

Flexibility in roles was another strength demonstrated by some pre-service teachers. When faced with unexpected challenges, they quickly adapted by redistributing responsibilities. As observed in OTT02's classroom: *"When one was absent, the other pre-service teachers quickly adapted by taking over their roles to ensure that the group's work could continue."* Leadership was also clearly demonstrated during group work. During a session, one pre-service teacher acting as an MC, and was described as *"very confident, open, patient and enthusiastic."* In terms of enthusiasm, pre-service EFL teachers showed a strong sense of connection within their groups. For example, in OTT05's classroom, it was observed: *"Some members even laughed happily. The class was quite noisy and happy."* This instance indicates that the pre-service EFL teachers enjoyed working together and valued the collaborative process.

However, not all groups were equally effective in managing roles and responsibilities. In OTT03's classroom, it was observed that *"Only one member of the group presented about the project. This could not show the collaboration among group members."* This scenario highlights the importance of clear communication and role distribution to ensure that all group members contribute to the task and that the collaboration is evident. Again, the practice of relationship skills among pre-service EFL teachers depends a lot on teacher trainers' expectation and guidance.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated both strengths and challenges in managing group work. Some excelled in collaboration, adaptability and leadership, actively engageing in group work and supporting peers; however, others tended to remain passive, relying on others to carry group responsibilities.

RES.4. I can prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways

Effective conflict management is an essential skill for maintaining positive relationships and ensuring successful collaboration in educational settings. Data from focus group interview and classroom observations reveal a contradiction in conflict management among pre-service teachers. In the focus group interview, FIPT06 admitted poor conflict resolution ability: *"When a problem occurs, I tend to be quite hot-tempered. I don't usually resolve conflicts; I just end the relationship."* This statement reflects a tendency to avoid conflicts rather than face and resolve them constructively. Instead of finding ways to resolve the conflicts, FIPT06 chose to withdraw and cut off relationships, which may have negative consequences for both personal and professional relationships.

Despite this self-reported challenge, explicit conflicts were rarely observed in actual classroom settings. Collaborative and supportive interactions were frequently noted such as in OTT05's classroom, where *"they worked collaboratively"* and in OTT01's classroom, where *"the presenters and the audience interacted continuously with each other."* The absence of conflicts may suggest that pre-service EFL teachers possess the ability to maintain harmony within their groups. However, it may also suggest that the pre-service teachers are either avoiding disagreements and conflicts or are not being placed in situations that require them to consider differing viewpoints and work through challenges collaboratively. This lack of exposure to conflicts may indicate missed opportunities for students to actively develop conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.

RES.5. I can seek or offer help and resources when needed

During the focus group interview and classroom observations, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated various levels of proficiency in seeking and offering support. FIPT04 reported a high level of this skill: *"I can identify people who share the same energy field as me. I recognize that I might lack in language skills, but I have quality relationships that allow me to seek support when I need."* The strong self-awareness of personal weaknesses such as language skills combined with the ability to form supportive relationships, demonstrate FIPT04's skill in making good use of social connections to compensate for individual weaknesses. When choosing and working with peers who can complement her abilities, FIPT04 maximized her learning potential to enhance both personal development and academic success.

Conversely, FIPT06 reflected on his difficulties: *"I find myself quite weak in seeking or offering support."* He explained, *"My self-management is already very good. I find my own ways, set my own goals and solve my problems myself, so I don't often seek help from other people."* FIPT05 also expressed a lack of trust in others: *"I often have to do everything myself because I don't trust others to do it right."* These pre-service teachers raised an thought-provoking point: those who demonstrate good self-management may not excel in relationship skills. In other words, pre-service teachers who are highly focused on personal discipline, self-reliance and individual performance may sometimes lack or avoid collaboration or emotional connection with peers. These reflections suggest that self-management must be balanced with relationship skills to ensure that pre-service teachers can effectively engage in collective experiences.

Despite these self-reported challenges, classroom observations reveal that many pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated good relationship skills by offering help when needed. In one case, *"When a pre-service teacher had problems with technology during a presentation, another pre-service teacher quickly stepped in to assist to ensure that the presentation could continue without disruption"* [OTT02]. This willingness to offer

support highlights pre-service EFL teachers' ability to recognize when others are in need and to provide help promptly.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated varying levels of proficiency in seeking and offering help, which directly impacted their relationship skills. Some pre-service EFL teachers exhibited strong abilities to build supportive networks and offer assistance, but others had problems with trust and help-seeking skills. Therefore, it is necessary to balance self-reliance with collaboration and foster an environment of mutual trust and support to enhance pre-service EFL teachers' relationship skills.

6.1.6. Pre-service EFL teachers' practices in Responsible Decision-Making

Responsible decision-making is an important competence under the SEL framework. This competence enables pre-service EFL teachers to make ethical and responsible decisions in both personal and professional contexts. In this section, the analysis of how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated responsible decision-making within their professional learning at the teacher training institution provides a comprehensive assessment on their ability to manage complex decision-making processes.

Overall evaluation of pre-service EFL teachers' responsible decision-making

The findings from the focus group interview with pre-service teachers and interviews with teacher trainers reveal that pre-service EFL teachers generally possess strong skills necessary for responsible decision-making. For instance, FIPT03 reflected: *"I would rate myself at about 3.8 or 4.0"* In alignment with this self-assessment, teacher trainers observed that pre-service teachers are generally capable of making context-appropriate decisions and are willing to accept responsibility for the consequences of their decisions: *"They often make decisions appropriate to the situation and are willing to take responsibility for their decisions"* [ITT04]. Furthermore, during the decision-making process, they frequently take into consideration social norms and the expectations of others, as ITT03 pointed out: *"They also consider social norms and other people's thoughts at the time and place of making those decisions."*

The questionnaire data aligns with the qualitative findings, but it offers a more comprehensive picture of strengths and weaknesses. As can be seen in Table 22, pre-service EFL teachers generally assessed themselves as highly competent in responsible decision-making; however, there are slight variations across specific skills. Among the five skills, RDM1 (M=3.80, SD=.804), which reflects the ability to identify and clarify information to assess trends and reliability, received the highest score. Similarly, RDM4 (M=3.73. SD=.803), which involves creative thinking and adapting solutions to changing contexts, was rated highly. RDM2 (M=3.75, SD=.735) shows that pre-service teachers consider a variety of factors when making decisions. However, RDM3 (M=3.65, SD=.871), related to gathering information, analyzing solutions and selecting

the best one, has a slightly lower mean score. The lowest mean score is recorded for RDM5 (M=3.60, SD=.797), which involves anticipating and evaluating the consequences of words and actions.

Table 27
Descriptive Statistics of Responsible Decision-making Skills

Responsible decision-making (RDM) skills	Mean	SD
RDM1. I can identify and clarify information from various sources to assess the trends and reliability of new ideas.	3.80	.804
RDM2. When making decisions, I consider a variety of factors.	3.75	.735
RDM3. I can gather relevant information, propose and analyze various solutions and select the most suitable one for problem-solving.	3.65	.871
RDM4. I can think creatively, create new elements from different ideas and adapt solutions to changing contexts.	3.73	.803
RDM5. I anticipate and evaluate the consequences of my words and actions.	3.60	.797

However, their decisions are sometimes influenced by a preference for harmony and conformity, potentially limiting assertiveness, risk-taking or innovative solutions. Teacher education programs should build on these strengths by integrating activities that challenge pre-service teachers to balance collective responsibility with individual agency, preparing them to make ethical, innovative and contextually appropriate decisions in their future classrooms.

RDM.1: Identifying and clarifying information from various sources to assess trends and reliability of new ideas

Pre-service EFL teachers possess strong responsible decision-making skills, especially in their ability to gather and evaluate information from various sources to ensure the reliability of any information. In the focus group interview, some pre-service EFL teachers emphasized the importance of evaluating information critically, especially in the context of the digital age, where there is abundance of unverified content online. FIPT09 stated: *"I always remind myself to check the source and compare information before deciding to use any idea in my lessons. Our lecturers also often remind us not to believe everything we find online, but to be selective and know how to verify it."* This statement illustrates an ability to identify and clarify information from multiple sources.

FIPT08 added: *"Whenever I find a teaching technique online, I ask my lecturer if it really works with my students. I don't just copy things without checking."* FIPT10 added: *"I also ask my classmates or upper-year peers how they use this technique. Their advice helps me a lot in designing my lessons."* FIPT05 reinforced this approach: *"If I'm not sure about an idea, I search on different websites or ask someone who has used it before. I don't want to apply something that I am not sure about."* These responses show that pre-service teachers not only depend on formal sources of information like coursebooks and instructors but also actively seek information from other sources like the internet and experienced peers to evaluate whether an idea is realistic or effective in real

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classrooms. This demonstrates their ability to make responsible decisions through gathering information, clarifying uncertainties and making the best choices.

During classroom observations, pre-service teachers demonstrated responsible decision-making through their efforts to verify and clarify information. When they encountered questions or uncertainties, many pre-service teachers showed a tendency to seek clarification by discussing with their classmates or searching online for additional information rather than relying solely on the lecturer or ignoring the issue. For example, when a question about a teaching method arose, they did not wait passively for the teacher to explain; instead, *"they used their mobile phone or laptop to search for the information"* [OTT02]. This instance demonstrates their ability to integrate digital resources effectively to ensure that their choices are based on reliable data.

However, not all pre-service teachers demonstrated this skill: some actively engaged in seeking clarification through peer discussions or online research, but others remained passive. They sat quietly, waited for answers from the lecturer, and showed no sign of trying to clarify the issue themselves. In some cases, they even appeared indifferent and ignored the problem. For example, during one group discussion task, some pre-service teachers appeared confused about the instructions but did not ask for clarification; they remained silent and unengaged: "*A few quietly whispered something to their peers, while others just sat still and appeared to do nothing. They did not use their phone or any reference material to look for information [OTT03].*

RDM.2: When making decisions, I consider a variety of factors

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated their competence in responsible decision-making by carefully considering a variety of factors, including ethical, social, practical and interpersonal dimensions. For instance, FIPT05 emphasized the importance of reviewing all relevant factors before deciding: *"I've considered everything. I make decisions quite quickly. Before deciding, I review everything comprehensively. So I think I'm someone who makes decisions very quickly."* Meanwhile, FIPT01 emphasized the importance of accuracy: *"Before I decide on something, I always try to consider all related factors to ensure my decision is correct."*

During a classroom activity, they were required to assess visual teaching aids by interacting directly and proactively with their designers to clarify details: *"They even asked the designers questions to get more information for their final decision. They discussed the practicality of each teaching aid, considering factors such as ease of use, durability and the likelihood of engaging students"* [OTT02]. This demonstrates their ability to consider a lot of factors to inform a thoughtful decision-making process.

In another activity on warm-up techniques, they actively worked with different perspectives, asked questions and raised issues for consideration: *"They asked a lot of*

questions, raised a lot of issues on different aspects of the warm-up activity" [OTT02]. They also considered inclusivity and fairness, especially in teaching methods. In one instance, a pre-service teacher identified potential gender stereotypes in a teaching activity: *"One pre-service teacher raised concerns about whether the teaching activity would lead to problems related to gender stereotypes"* [OTT02]. Another pre-service teacher remarked: *"I wonder if your warm-up activity matches the students' level and if the class time is enough."* The response of the designer is: *"I chose a quiz because I saw that my students were shy. I thought it might interest them, but I have made it simple enough for them."* This instance illustrates how the pre-service teachers weighed differnt factors before making the final decision.

RDM.3: Gathering relevant information, proposing and analyzing various solutions and selecting the most suitable one for problem-solving

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated competence in gathering relevant information, analyzing different solutions and selecting the most suitable one for problem-solving. For example, they displayed their analytical skills during a discussion about teaching methods. Recognizing the limitations of group discussions for shy students, one pre-service teacher suggested, *"I think using group discussions is engaging, but it might not work well for shy learners. How can we involve everyone?"* Their collaboration led to brainstorming different strategies to get all students involved. During another discussion activity on classroom management, pre-service EFL teachers discussed how to motivate students. One pre-service teacher suggested, *"If we create a reward system, it might motivate students to participate more actively. But we also need to ensure it's fair for everyone."* Another added, *"Let's consider rewards like stickers or small gifts like pencils and erasers."*

RDM.4: Thinking creatively, creating new elements from different ideas and adapting solutions to changing contexts

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated responsible decision-making by thinking creatively and adapting their solutions to fit changing contexts. For example, when working on an investment decision, they adjusted their initial decision after considering the decisions of other groups. The fieldnotes recorded: *"When seeing the deal of the other groups, some groups did make changes in their deal"* [OTT05]. In a discussion on warm-up activities, as they identified potential challenges like time constraints and student disengagement, they proposed other different strategies to make the activity more effective: *"They identified potential issues such as time constraints and possible student disengagement and suggested alternative strategies to make the warm-up activity more engaging and time-consuming"* [OTT02]. These instances showcase their ability to anticipate problems and generate new, practical solutions to fit changing situations.

RDM.5: Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's words and actions

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate responsible decision-making by effectively anticipating and evaluating the consequences of their words and actions. This skill is showcased through their ability to carefully weigh the potential outcomes of their decisions in various classroom activities. For example, FIPT06 shared how reflection on past mistakes informs his decision-making: *"I usually try to learn from past mistakes to avoid making hasty decisions. I once gave very direct feedback on my classmates' performance and noticed that I had hurt their feelings, so I learned to be more careful with my words."* However, some acknowledged challenges in balancing personal desires with social considerations. For example, FIPT07 noted: *"There are times when I still do what I want or have to do even though I know others won't like it."*

During classroom observations, many pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated evidence of anticipating and evaluating the consequences of their words and actions when interacting with their classmates, lecturers and students. For example, when giving feedback to peers during micro-teaching or group activities, they were observed carefully choosing their words, using polite and encouraging language rather than blunt criticism. For example, instead of saying *"That's wrong,"* or *"I don't agree,"* they tended to say *"That's an interesting point, but I have different ideas".* This behavior reflects their awareness of how their words could influence others' emotions.

In summary, the findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated moderate-to-high proficiency across the five core SECs, with Social Awareness and Responsible Decision-Making rated as strengths, and Self-Management as the weakest. Self-Awareness was also strong, as pre-service teachers were able to reflect on their emotions and values, but it often remained reflective rather than action-oriented. Social Awareness and Relationship Skills reflected their openness to collaboration and respect for peers, but with limited depth in empathy or conflict resolution. Responsible Decision-Making was demonstrated in their ability to evaluate information, generate appropriate solutions and take responsibility, but their decisions often prioritized conformity over innovation. These findings suggest that pre-service teachers are capable in reflection, collaboration and decision-making, but they lack systematic strategies for self-management, deeper empathy and conflict resolution, leaving their practices in SECs functional but not yet fully developed.

6.2. Pre-service EFL Teachers' Practices in SEL Instructional Competence

This section transitions from personal SECs to examining pre-service EFL teachers' role as teachers and their demonstration of SEL instructional competence in actual teaching practices. It will first provide an overall evaluation of SEL instructional competence and then examine specific components of this competence, including applying knowledge of

psychology and pedagogy, addressing social-emotional issues explicitly, modeling SECs, designing SEL activities, and assessing students' SECs.

6.2.1. Overall assessment of SEL instructional competence

The interview data from both teacher trainers and pre-service teachers consistently show that SEL instructional competence among pre-service teachers is currently at a moderate level and varied across the individuals. One teacher trainer, ITT04, remarked: *"We've never formally assessed SEL instructional competence in our pre-service teachers, but from what I've seen, I would say it's at a moderate level. It is shown in the way they interact with students, how they organize group activities or how they manage classroom situations, but overall, this competence needs to be paid more attention."* ITT04 acknowledged a notable gap in the curriculum - SEL instructional competence has not been formally assessed, which may explain why it lacks clarity or consistency in teaching practice. However, some aspects of this competence are being indirectly, unintentionally or intuitively applied by pre-service teachers.

Similarly, ITT01 commented: *"Overall, the demonstration of this competence among pre-service teachers is not very clear. If any, I would say it's at a moderate or above average level."* ITT01 pointed out a lack of clarity in how SEL instructional competence manifests in pre-service teachers' practice. The phrase "not very clear" implies that this competence is not made explicit either in the curriculum or classroom practices. ITT03 further explained: *"We don't specifically require them to implement SEL in their teaching. But I think, in some ways, they might be doing it indirectly, through how they manage their classrooms or interact with students, even if they're not fully aware it's related to SEL. Overall, I would say their competence is at a moderate level, but it really depends. Some do very well, but others don't."* This comment, again, implies that SEL is neither explicitly embedded nor required, but it is manifested through informal, unconscious and unintentional practice. The trainer also pointed out significant variations among pre-service teachers, but, in general it is assessed at moderate level.

The pre-service teachers also self-assessed their SEL instructional competence at moderate-to-high level. For example, FIPT01 said: *"I would rate my competence at a fairly good level, but I believe I could do much better if I received more training and had more materials."* FIPT01 reflects a realistic and growth-oriented self-assessment. He assessed his competence as "fairly good" but emphasized the need for more training. Similarly, FIPT03 remarked: *"Right now, I would assess this competence at a fairly good level, but I know I still need to learn more and get more practice."* This statement points to a desire for hands-on opportunities to apply SEL in authentic teaching practices.

Together, interview data reveal that both teacher trainers and pre-service teachers generally agree that SEL instructional competence is present, but moderate, implicit,

intuitive and inconsistent. There is a clear desire for formal assessment, clearer expectations and more guided practice to foster this competence for pre-service teachers. Moving to quantitative data, Table 28 offers a comprehensive assessment of pre-service EFL teachers' proficiency in the five components of SEL instructional competence. The overall SEL instructional competence of pre-service EFL teachers was rated at a moderate level (M=3.34), aligning closely with the assessments in the interview.

Table 28
Self-reported Proficiency in SEL Instructional Competence

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
SEL instructional competence (SELIC)	1	3.8	3.34	.398
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy	1	4	3.66	.596
SELIC 2. Use SEL concepts explicitly to address social and emotional issues in teaching practices	1	3	2.96	.241
SELIC 3. Model good SECs in EFL teaching	1	4	3.55	.652
SELIC 4. Organize activities to foster SECs for students	1	5	3.75	.797
SELIC 5. Assess students' SECs	1	3	2.79	.444

SELIC 1 received the highest mean score (3.66). It means that pre-service EFL teachers generally feel confident in their ability to apply psychological and pedagogical principles. Qualitative data confirm this strength, with evidence of diverse and effective teaching methods such as inquiry-based learning and task-based language teaching, which can foster both language proficiency and SECs for students (see section 6.2.2).

SELIC 4 achieved the second-highest mean score (3.75). It means that the pre-service EFL teachers were quite confident in designing activities to promote SECs for their students. Qualitative data also indicate that most of the observed pre-service teachers could organize learning activities to facilitate language acquisition and naturally foster SECs; however, they lacked explicit emphasis and clear guidance to optimize their impacts on students (see section 6.2.3).

SELIC 3 also received a high mean score of 3.55 with moderate standard deviation (SD=.652), indicating moderate variations among pre-service EFL teachers in modeling SECs for their students. Classroom observations support this finding with examples of effective modelling of SECs by some pre-service teachers, alongside limited practices among others (see section 6.2.4).

SELIC 2 scored a much lower mean at 2.96. This low score indicates pre-service teachers' lack of competence in using explicit SEL concepts to address the social and emotional issues emerging in their classroom. In other words, they had difficulties in verbalizing SEL concepts like empathy, emotional regulation or social awareness in their lesson plans or classroom language. This finding is reinforced by qualitative data, which highlight missed opportunities to address students' emotions and social challenges during lessons (see section 6.2.5).

SELIC 5 received the lowest mean score at 2.79. It means that assessment of SECs is the biggest challenge for pre-service EFL teachers in implementing SEL. Qualitative interview and observation data confirm this gap, consistently noting the absence of structured or explicit practices of assessing students' SECs among the pre-service teachers (see section 6.2.6). The relatively low standard deviation (SD=.444) indicates that this is a common challenge across the group of pre-service EFL teachers.

In summary, the data reveal that pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate moderate and uneven levels of SEL instructional competence. They show notable strengths in applying pedagogical knowledge, modeling certain SECs, and designing interactive activities, but their practices are weaker in explicitly addressing social-emotional issues and assessing students' SECs. This imbalance reflects the limitations of their training program, where SEL principles are present in content but not consistently and explicitly taught. This gap highlights the need for targeted training, where SEL should be treated as a visible, intentional and sustainable element of professional competence.

6.2.2. SELIC 1 - Applying knowledge of psychology and pedagogy

Applying knowledge of psychology and pedagogy is an important component of SEL instructional competence for pre-service EFL teachers. This encompasses understanding and implementing psychological principles and teaching methods that can enhance academic success as well as social and emotional skills for students. Observations reveal varying levels of proficiency among pre-service teachers in applying psychological and pedagogical strategies such as inquiry-based learning, communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT) and humanistic principles. However, many pre-service teachers still faced notable challenges such as insufficient differentiation, reliance on traditional methods and missed opportunities for digital integration.

Meticulous lesson planning

Pre-service EFL teachers displayed meticulous planning, as reflected in their use of well-designed powerpoint slides and supplementary teaching aids: *"Some pre-service teachers, when playing the role of an EFL teacher, prepared thoroughly for activity delivery. They designed visually appealing slides and related handouts, followed the instructor's lesson procedure, gave clear instructions, checked understanding, provided constructive and positive feedback, helped students identify and correct mistakes, checked answers with the class, transitioned smoothly into the new lesson and concluded activities effectively."* This meticulous preparation proves their commitment to delivering effective lessons. The use of visual aids and other supplementary teaching materials demonstrated their understanding and application of multimodal learning principles to facilitate the language learning process.

Other classroom observation instances further illustrate their dedication to lesson planning to support students' holistic development. OPT11 demonstrated her creativity in her grammar lesson: *"Instead of relying solely on the textbook, OPT11 designed her own visual aids and used real-life examples to clarify grammar points."* OPT10 exemplified a growth mindset in professional development: *"Before her lesson, OPT10 sought feedback from her mentor and adjusted her plan accordingly."* However, some pre-service EFL teachers failed to demonstrate this competence: *"OPT09 could not deliver an engaging lesson; she adhered strictly to the lesson plan and did not adjust activities in the textbook to attract disengaged students."* These practices indicate a lack of creativity and careful preparation.

Some pre-service EFL teachers missed opportunities to integrate digital tools in their lesson plans and delivery, which could have enhanced learning. As recorded in the fieldnotes: *"Students answered comprehension questions after reading a passage about environmental issues, but there was no follow-up discussion to explore how the topic relates to their lives or digital tools they could use to explore more"* [OPT04]. Including a collaborative research task using online resources could have expanded the lesson's relevance and encouraged students to investigate the topic from multiple perspectives and apply what they have learned in meaningful ways.

Inquiry-based learning and constructivism

OPT06 effectively applied constructivist principles in her grammar lesson by using an inquiry-based approach to foster active learning and self-discovery. Instead of teaching grammar rules deductively, she got her students involved in her lesson with thought-provoking questions, encouraged them to analyze patterns and collaboratively derive the rules by themselves. As recorded in the fieldnotes: *"OPT06 moved around the room and asked students, 'What can you see in these examples? In what ways are they alike or different?'"* This method resembles the Silent Way, where OPT06 acted as a guide rather than a direct instructor. By the end of the activity, students confidently explained the rules to one another with minimal intervention from the teacher.

However, a notable limitation observed during their teaching practices was the lack of differentiation or scaffolding techniques. The fieldnotes recorded: *"Some students participated enthusiastically, while others needed more support, but OPT06 repeated the same instruction without adapting her questions for those needing additional explanation."* In another instance, OPT09's vocabulary lesson highlighted a more traditional approach that lacked constructivist and cognitivist strategies. Students took part in repetitive drills, but many of them could not use the words meaningfully: *"Students repeated words several times but had difficulty using them in sentences. OPT09 failed to associate the words with meaningful contexts."* The lack of relatable contexts limited students' ability to use the vocabulary in real contexts.

Communicative language teaching and Social learning theory

OPT07 successfully combined Communicative language teaching with Social learning theory through a role-play activity that emphasized authentic, context-based interactions. The fieldnotes recorded: *"OPT07 organized a role-play activity where students worked in groups and imagined themselves as scientists to create innovative environmental solutions, using conditional forms in meaningful, real-world contexts. The pre-service teacher gave clear instructions and modeled the target language using conditional forms (e.g., "If I were a scientist, I would…"). Students appeared engaged and enthusiastic, actively collaborating to share their ideas."* This activity effectively encouraged meaningful interactions and provided opportunities for students to practice language skills and other social-emotional skills such as decision-making, empathy, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking and constructive communication.

However, the activity could have been even more effective if the teacher had encouraged more interactions between different groups and provided stronger scaffolding to support that process. For example, after each group presented their ideas, they could have joined another group to listen, give feedback or take on new roles like a government official or environmental reporter. To guide this, the teacher could have provided supportive prompts or guiding questions such as "How will your solution impact people's lives?" or "What challenges might come up if this idea is used in real life?" These types of prompts would help students learn to share ideas, give feedback, listen to others and think more deeply about how their solutions might affect people and the planet. Scaffolding like this also supports students who may be shy or unsure of what to say. In this way, the activity could help students develop language, social and emotional skills in a much more impactful manner.

Task-based language teaching

Most of the observed pre-service EFL teachers could apply task-based language teaching principles during their teaching practices. For example, in a group discussion session on the topic "Creative Inventions That Can Change the World", OPT03 could promote not only practical language use but also social and emotional skills among her students. According to the fieldnotes: *"Students worked in small groups to brainstorm and explain creative inventions that can change the world. They collaborated actively, using English to describe how their inventions worked and who would benefit. OPT03 circulated the room, offering suggestions like, "You could try drawing a mind-map to organize your ideas," and "Maybe a small poster would help you present more clearly." One or two representatives from each group then presented their invention to the class."* This lesson illustrates how the thoughtful application of psychological and pedagogical principles can enhance both language proficiency and SECs such as self-awareness, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, negotiation and teamwork in the EFL classroom.

However, this activity could have been made more impactful if OPT03 had encouraged the rest of the class to listen actively and ask follow-up questions during the group presentations. This would have given the presenting students more authentic opportunities to practise public speaking, explain their ideas more clearly and respond to others' feedback. At the same time, it would have helped the audience practise respectful listening and learn how to give feedback in a constructive manner. The activity could also have ended with a short post-task reflection, where students can share how their group worked together, how they felt during the task and what they learned from other groups' inventions. This could have enriched their overall learning experiences.

Using psychological strategies to enhance student engagement and motivation

Pre-service EFL teachers employed various strategies to motivate and engage their students. For instance, some pre-service EFL teachers prepared small gifts for their mock students: *"Some pre-service teachers even prepared some kinds of gifts for their mocked students"* [OTT04]. Although intrinsic motivation is ideal, extrinsic motivators can be effective, especially for younger or hesitant learners. These rewards encouraged participation and enthusiasm, aligning with Skinner's reinforcement theory, which suggests that rewards strengthen desired behaviors such as active involvement in class activities (Skinner, 1953).

OPT01 excelled in creating a classroom environment where students felt valued and empowered. She combined effective academic instruction with emotional support, and this exemplified a Humanistic approach: *"OPT01's good instructional skills, combined with her supportive manner, created a classroom environment where students felt safe, respected and engaged fully in the learning process."* During a speaking activity, OPT01 demonstrated her emotional sensitivity: *"When a student showed signs of hesitation and anxiety, OPT01 stood by the student and comforted her, saying, 'It's completely normal to feel nervous; we're all here to support you.'"* This reassurance helped the student overcome anxiety and accomplish their speaking task. OPT01 also used constructive feedback to build students' confidence: *"OPT01 provided feedback that was both constructive and encouraging, helping students feel valued and motivated."* This strategy not only nurtured students' self-esteem but also fostered a positive learning environment where they felt safe to take risks, learn from mistakes and build resilience.

Similarly, OPT07 demonstrated strong skills in integrating multimedia and physical elements such as color, sound and lighting to create an engaging atmosphere. According to the field notes: *"OPT07 could handle all the teaching aids and the multimedia in the classroom very well. She could also combine physical aspects of the classroom like color, sound and light. Her classroom was very active, warm and lively."* This reflects an understanding of multimodal learning, where sensory inputs enhance engagement and retention. Her strategy aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which emphasizes the

importance of a safe, welcoming environment as a facilitator for learning. OPT07 tried to make her students feel comfortable and supported; therefore, she could facilitate active engagement and higher levels of motivation to learn among her students.

OPT03's use of a quiz and a reward system demonstrated the effective application of extrinsic motivation: *"OPT03 asked a lot of questions to help students discover the knowledge by themselves. She also organized a quiz for the whole class, where the highest-scoring student received a gift. The students were very happy and enthusiastic, working individually or in pairs, discussing and trying to give the correct answers as quickly as possible."* This activity not only enhances student engagement but also encourages collaboration and individual effort. However, OPT03 missed opportunities to foster a more emotionally supportive classroom environment. The fieldnotes recorded: *"OPT03 hardly praised or motivated her students. She didn't address them by name or provide feedback on their answers or performances."* This lack of personalized interactions and constructive feedback limited the potential for deeper connections with students.

In summary, the observed pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated commendable efforts in applying psychological and pedagogical principles, especially through inquiry-based learning, communicative language teaching, task-based learning and humanistic approaches. However, they still had difficulties in differentiation, scaffolding, giving instructions and constructive feedback, post-task reflection, digital learning and holistic education. Addressing these gaps can lead to more inclusive and effective teaching practices that better meet the academic and social emotional needs of students.

6.2.3. SELIC 2 - Addressing social and emotional issues explicitly

An important aspect of applying SEL principles is explicitly addressing social-emotional issues that arise in the classroom. However, many pre-service teachers could not manage these issues effectively; they often focused solely on content delivery and neglected or failed to address the social and emotional dimensions of language learning.

The observations reveal a recurring tendency among pre-service EFL teachers to prioritize academic content delivery over addressing students' social and emotional issues. This approach often led to disengaged classrooms and missed opportunities for fostering important skills such as social and emotional skills. For instance, in OPT02's class, the focus was solely on delivering or covering all the lesson content in the textbook; whereas behavioral and emotional cues such as noise, anxiety, sleeping and inattention were not acknowledged or addressed, and this resulted in a disconnected and disengaged classroom atmosphere: *"OPT02 paid more attention to the academic dimension of the lesson than the social-emotional aspects. She focused on delivering the lesson content. Some students made noise, fell asleep, talked to each other or didn't pay attention; however, OPT02 ignored these behaviors. All of these lead to a noisy and disengaging learning environment."* Hardly any attempts were made to re-engage the students or

check in with their needs. This suggests a need for more training in noticing, recognizing and responding to students' emotional states and social interactions as these aspects are not separate from instruction; actually they are integral to the learning process.

In another instance, OPT02 failed to maintain classroom focus and manage disruptions. The field notes recorded: *"When a few students at the back began chatting, OPT02 tried to manage the disruption by raising her voice but didn't implement strategies to re-engage them or regain control of the class."* Raising her voice alone was insufficient to address the issue. Alternative strategies such as assigning disruptive students active roles could have redirected their attention constructively. This approach aligns with Kounin's (1970) principles of classroom management, which stress the importance of proactive strategies to prevent and address disruptions.

Other observation instances reveal similar patterns. OPT03 and OPT05 both delivered academically rigorous lessons but failed or neglected to address visible social and emotional issues such as distraction, fatigue or anxiety. *"Several students were visibly disengaged and tired, but OPT03 continued with the lesson without pausing to check in or provide emotional support."* In OPT05's class, *"the lesson focused heavily on grammar drills and vocabulary practice, with minimal interaction that encouraged students to reflect on their emotional or social development during the lesson."* Similarly, OPT08 demonstrated a strong emphasis on academic instruction but showed minimal attention to student motivation or emotional engagement: *"OPT08 did not pay much attention to the social emotional dimensions of teaching and learning. She paid too much attention to the delivering of the academic content of the lesson."*

In a role-play activity observed in OPT04's class, students displayed anxiety, but the teacher did not provide strategies to manage these emotions, so she missed a chance to nurture emotion-regulation skills for her students. *"A few students were visibly nervous and avoiding eye contact during the role-play. OPT04 focused solely on content and did not provide any strategies for managing their anxiety."* Similarly, OPT09 and OPT02 overlooked moments where students showed signs of discomfort or nervousness. For instance, in OPT02's class, *"The student looked down and avoided speaking for several seconds. The pre-service teacher gestured for the group to continue without pausing to address the student's visible discomfort."*

Intentional or explicit opportunities for emotional reflections were noticeably absent from the observed lessons, even in activities that could naturally elicit emotional responses. For example, in OPT07's role-play activity, students were involved in collaboration and conflict resolution. Although the activity successfully fostered interaction and problem-solving, the teacher did not guide students to reflect on their emotions during or after the process. *"Although the activity encouraged students to interact and solve problems together, the teacher did not ask them to reflect on how they*

felt or how they managed challenges during the process." OPT07 missed an important chance to enhance students' SECs such as self-awareness and emotional regulation.

Social challenges such as disengagement and conflicts, were also rarely addressed explicitly by the observed pre-service teachers. For instance, during OPT06's presentation task, *"several students were chatting and using their phones, showing no interest in the presentation. The teacher did not intervene or redirect their attention."* This inaction allowed disengagement to persist, resulting in missed opportunities to develop students' social awareness and relationship skills such as active listening and mutual respect. A similar issue was observed during OPT05's group task, where some students were disengaged, working on unrelated tasks; however, *"the teacher moved around the room and did not address the lack of engagement."*

Another important observation is that many pre-service EFL teachers did not use clear and appropriate language to address social and emotional issues directly in the classroom. When students were off-task, talking, or showing signs of disengagement, most pre-service teachers did not name the behavior directly or guide students back in a constructive way. Instead, they often ignored it or simply said things like *"Pay attention!"* or *"Keep silent!"*, which seemed to be ineffective. Better ways to respond could be "I notice there's some talking. Let's all come back together so we can continue," or "Let's show respect to our classmates by listening attentively." This type of classroom language not only corrects the behavior but also models respectful communication and sets clear expectations. They create a more emotionally safe environment and show students that the teacher values respect, trust and cooperation, not just control.

In summary, all of the above observations reveal a consistent pattern: pre-service EFL teachers, during their teaching practices, often neglected or failed to address students' social-emotional issues; they focused on covering all the contents in the textbooks, linguistic accuracy or task completion but overlooked social and emotional aspects. The finding also reveals that the pre-service teachers often relied on reactive classroom management rather than proactive SEL instruction. They seemed to lack the necessary vocabulary or classroom language on social-emotional issues to address them explicitly and effectively. This gap highlights a need for the teacher training program to equip pre-service teachers with explicit strategies, classroom language and practical tools for SEL.

6.2.4. SELIC 3 - Modeling SECs in EFL teaching practices

Modeling SECs is an important component of SEL instructional competence as it can significantly contribute to the development of SECs for students. When teachers model SECs in teaching practices, it will be easier for students to internalize these competencies. The findings reveal considerable variation in pre-service EFL teachers' ability to model SECs, with some effectively demonstrating social awareness, self-management and relationship skills, while others showed limited modelling.

Limited modeling of self-awareness

Observations of pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practices reveal limited modeling of self-awareness. Some pre-service teachers modeled self-awareness by sharing their personal experiences and emotions to connect with students. For instance, OPT01 reflected on her own experiences with anxiety to support students during a difficult exercise: *"I remember feeling nervous when I was a student, but I realized that careful preparation and daily practice really helped me."* Using this strategy, OPT01 could model self-awareness and offer practical strategies at the same time.

Similarly, OPT04 openly acknowledged her nervousness at the start of a lesson: *"I'm a bit nervous today, but I'm looking forward to working with you."* This acknowledgement fostered a supportive atmosphere, as students responded positively with smiles and encouragement. Meanwhile, OPT06 used her preference for storytelling to create a personal connection: *"I've always loved stories. They help us understand language and each other."* This raised student interest and encouraged active participation.

However, such examples were quite rare. In most observed lessons, pre-service EFL teachers didn't often model self-awareness for their students. For example, one of the field note remarked: *"OPT05 followed the subject matter closely but did not introduce any personal emotions or experiences into the content."* Integrating personal experiences and emotions into lessons could enrich the learning experience and foster stronger teacher-student connections. Moreover, students can learn more about self-awareness by observing their teacher modeling this competence daily.

Limited modeling of self-management

The observations reveal that many pre-service EFL teachers could not model good self-management skills in front of their students during their teaching practices. A few could effectively model emotional regulation, adaptability and time management; however, others failed to do so. For example, OPT07 effectively modeled emotion regulation for her students when a disruptive moment arose during a discussion by calmly redirecting students' attention: *"Let's focus on your task. I want the whole class to be silent so that we can hear everyone's ideas."* Instead of getting angry, the pre-service teacher could manage her emotions, stay calm and redirect students' attention to the lesson.

In addition, only a few pre-service teachers, such as OPT01 and OPT03. explicitly stated clear lesson objectives at the beginning of the lesson, and then , at the end of the lesson helped students reflect on what had been achieved or what to improve next time. This practice supports student autonomy and motivation. Modeling goal-setting and reflection demonstrates a teacher's ability to plan with purpose and evaluate success—skills that are essential for lifelong learning and for fostering similar habits in students. For example, *"At the beginning of the lesson, OPT01 clearly stated her objectives for the*

lesson and reviewed them at the end: 'Let's see if we reached our goals—did we use the new vocabulary in our presentations?'" This practice indicated OPT01 could effectively model and encourage explicit goal-setting and self-evaluation for her students.

However, some pre-service EFL teachers failed to model good self-management. OPT04, for instance, became visibly confused, worried and nervous when facing with a technical issue. She spent a lot of time trying to fix a malfunctioning projector instead of moving on to another activity: *"When the projector malfunctioned, OPT04 became visibly confused and spent a lot of time trying to fix it. Instead of moving on to another activity, she allowed the technical problem to consume valuable class time. Students began chatting and losing interest."* Similarly, OPT06 appeared confused and helpless when some of the students in her class became too noisy: *"When a few students at the back were talking too loudly and not paying attention, OPT06 seemed too confused and helpless to address the problem satisfactorily."* She failed to model self-management skills, especially emotion regulation and adaptability in front of her students.

Time management also varied significantly among pre-service EFL teachers. OPT13 demonstrated exceptional skill by pacing her lesson carefully and ensuring all tasks were completed on time: *"OPT13 arrived early, rearranged the classroom to support group work, and started the lesson with enthusiasm. She kept a close eye on the clock throughout the lesson, using a timer to ensure that each activity was given the right amount of time. She was able to cover all the lesson content without rushing or leaving tasks incomplete."* Conversely, OPT04 spent too much time on grammar explanations and controlled practices, leaving little time for language production: *"OPT04 spent too much time explaining the grammar point and didn't leave enough time for students to produce the language freely. As a result, the students were unable to complete the final task before the class ended."*

Rare modeling of social awareness

Social awareness is important for effective teaching as it encompasses the ability to understand students' emotions, strengths and weaknesses to foster a respectful, inclusive learning environment. However, observations of pre-service teachers during their teaching practices reveal that most of them rarely modeled social awareness skills such as empathizing with others' feelings, recognizing individuals' strengths and weaknesses, understanding different perspectives, respecting others, and appreciating diversity.

Only a few instances of pre-service EFL teachers modelling social awareness were recorded. For example, OPT12 checked in on her students' well-being before beginning a lesson: *"How is everyone today? Are you ready for today's tasks?"* When a student mentioned feeling tired, she adapted her tone and started with an interesting warm-up activity. OPT07 actively got her students involved in discussions and praised their ideas with responses like, *"That's an interesting idea"* and *"I hadn't thought of it that way*

before." These responses indicate that the pre-service teachers were modeling important social-awareness skills during their classroom practices. This modelling sets authentic examples for students to develop empathy, perspective-taking, appreciation of diversity, respect and openness to others.

Conversely, other pre-service teachers failed to model social awareness. For example, OPT03's shyness and lack of confidence limited her interactions with students, causing her to miss opportunities to provide support when students appeared confused: *"OPT03 stayed close to the podium and rarely walked around the class. She didn't interact much with individual students and when some students appeared confused or worried, she failed to notice or offer help."* OPT09 also showed limited confidence, spoke softly, avoided addressing students by name and failed to assist students timely: *"When one student seemed nervous during a speaking activity, she didn't notice or offer support."* Similarly, OPT04 tended to rely on a few high-performing students for answers while neglecting the others: "There was little sign of effort to recognize or include quieter students." This practice limited the chance to address students' diversity, their multiple viewpoints, strengths and limitations.

Variability in modeling relationship skills

Relationship skills are fundamental to effective teaching, as they involve the ability to communicate effectively with students, manage conflicts, foster collaboration and provide or seek support when needed. Several pre-service teachers could model relationship skills for their students. OPT01, for instance, consistently created a warm and inclusive atmosphere by personally greeting students with questions like, *"How was your weekend?"* and *"Did you enjoy yesterday's activity?"* This quick check-in helped students feel recognized and valued. Similarly, OPT07 encouraged collaboration and inclusivity during group discussion by ensuring every student had a chance to contribute: *"During the group discussion, OPT07 encouraged students to share their opinions and made sure everyone's voice was heard by asking each group member to contribute."*

In contrast, other pre-service EFL teachers rarely modeled relationship skills for their students. They often appeared detached and failed to interact with students directly. OPT04, for instance, lacked personal interaction and rarely praised or motivated her students: *"OPT04 hardly praised or motivated her students. She didn't address her students by name; she didn't remember the names of her students. Although she tried to call on different students at different times to give all the students equal opportunities to share their ideas, she hardly gave comments or feedback on her students' answers or performances."*

OPT02 similarly failed to maintain relationships with her students: *"OPT02 remained at her desk for most of the lesson, giving instructions from a distance and not interacting directly with the students."* This distance resulted in disengaged students who hesitated

to seek help. Even when students raised their hands for clarification, *"OPT02 answered their questions from her desk without moving closer to the students and her responses were short and lacked detail."* OPT05 also displayed hesitance to interact directly with students; she rarely moved around the classroom or checked on students during group activities: *"Throughout the lesson, OPT05 rarely made eye contact with students or moved around the classroom. She gave instructions from the front and did not check on students during group activities."*

All of these instances reveal a very concerning issue: many pre-service EFL teachers failed or neglected to model and build relationships with their students although these skills are very important for maintaining classroom harmony, boosting student engagement and enhancing academic success.

Variability in modelling responsible decision-making

Responsible decision-making is an essential competency for teaching effectiveness as it may involve adapting instruction to meet students' needs, fostering engagement and addressing challenges effectively. Observations of pre-service EFL teachers reveal significant variations in their ability to make thoughtful and informed decisions to respond to students' needs.

Several pre-service EFL teachers modeled strong decision-making skills by adapting their teaching strategies to enhance student understanding and engagement. OPT01, for instance, quickly responded to students' confusion during a vocabulary exercise: *"She noticed that some students were confused about the meaning of a word. She immediately gave them simpler examples and checked if they understood before moving on."* Similarly, OPT10 re-engaged disengaged groups during a project by introducing a competitive element: *"She saw that some groups were not participating as actively as others. To re-engage them, she added a competitive element to the task, where each group had to present their ideas within a time limit."*

OPT11 modelled adaptability by extending a lesson activity with a peer review when students finished earlier than anticipated: *"After realizing that the students had completed the task faster than anticipated, OPT11 quickly extended the activity by adding a peer review component, where students shared their work with each other and provided feedback."* OPT07 also modelled flexibility and creativity when simplifying a role-play activity that students found challenging: *"When the students were confused, she simplified the activity by allowing them more freedom to create their own dialogues. This made the task more engaging and the students quickly became more involved."*

Conversely, some pre-service EFL teachers had difficulty with modeling responsible decision-making, which resulted in missed opportunities to support student learning.

OPT04 failed to adjust her teaching methods during a grammar explanation despite visible student disengagement: *"She continued the lesson without addressing the students' lack of interest."* Similarly, OPT02 failed to adapt to real-time classroom challenges: *"When students showed signs of disengagement during a grammar lesson, OPT02 continued with the original lesson plan without adjusting her teaching method."*

OPT03 could not make timely classroom management decisions to address a disruption when a student fell asleep during her lesson: *"She asked the student to focus once, but when the behavior continued, she moved on without addressing it further."* This lack of assertiveness allowed the behavior to persist and affected the focus of other students. Similarly, OPT05 failed to adapt her teaching method when her explanation of a grammar rule failed to align with students: *"She continued with the same approach rather than offering an alternative explanation or activity."* Her inability to propose alternative strategies reflected a gap in problem-solving skills.

Overall, responsible decision-making was a notable strength among pre-service EFL teachers like OPT01, OPT10 and OPT11, who skillfully adapted their methods to address classroom challenges, promote engagement and support student comprehension. Their ability to gather relevant information, assess classroom needs and creatively implement solutions helped create a dynamic and student-centered learning environment. However, pre-service EFL teachers like OPT02, OPT03 and OPT05 faced challenges in adapting their instruction and addressing disruptions effectively; as a result, they failed to model responsible decision-making for their students.

In summary, the data reveal significant gaps in the ability of pre-service EFL teachers to model SECs during their teaching practices, though they may possess strong personal SECs. This indicates a gap between possessing SECs personally and demonstrating them professionally. This gap reflects the influence of the program, which provides few opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice modeling SECs in authentic teaching contexts. Without feedback and guided reflection, pre-service teachers may lack the awareness or strategies to demonstrate SECs visibly in their teaching practices.

6.2.5. SELIC 4 - Designing activities to foster SECs for students

Designing and organizing activities to foster SECs is a very important component of SEL instructional competence. Classroom observations and focus group interview reveal the diverse strategies employed by pre-service teachers to facilitate learning and at the same time promote SECs for students. Activities like interactive games, creative and reflective tasks, role-playing simulations, project-based learning, debating, reading exercises and group discussion were frequently used by pre-service teachers. However, most of these activities lacked depth, flexibility and clear guidelines, and the goal of

fostering SECs is not overt or explicit enough to optimize its potential impacts on both students' language proficiency and social-emotional skills.

Interactive games

Interactive games were frequently used by pre-service EFL teachers to facilitate language learning and foster social interaction, teamwork and active listening for their students. For instance, OPT01 used a *Whisper game* as a warm-up activity, where students passed a message along by whispering it to the next person in their team. This activity could not only effectively engage students but also enhance attention, listening skills and cooperation.

OPT06 implemented a *Memory Match* game, where students paired words with corresponding images: *"OPT06 guided the students to work in pairs and encouraged them to share their thoughts before making a match."* This activity strengthened relationship skills by encouraging communication and partnership. However, some students became disengaged as the activity progressed and the fieldnotes remarked, *"OPT06 did not adjust the game's structure to re-engage students."* This reflected a missed opportunity to adapt the activity and maintain active participation. Similarly, OPT12 utilized a *Passing the Ball* game, which encouraged students to make a sentence about their preferences when the ball reached them. This game provided students with an interactive platform to practice language skills and foster SECs like self-awareness, self-management and social awareness.

OPT11 demonstrated creativity with a *Find Someone Who* task, which required students to find peers with shared interests or experiences: *"OPT11 created a lively atmosphere where students moved around the classroom, participated in conversations and asked questions like, 'Have you tried sushi?' or 'Have you traveled abroad?'"* This activity fostered self-awareness, relationship-building and social awareness, as students shared and learned about their peers' experiences. However, *"Some students finished quickly and seemed unsure of what to do next and OPT11 didn't provide additional instructions to keep them engaged after the main activity ended."* This limitation indicates a need for better and more flexible planning to sustain engagement.

Creative and reflective tasks

Some pre-service EFL teachers effectively utilized creative and reflective tasks to foster self-awareness and social awareness for their students. An outstanding example was OPT01's Art Gallery activity, where students created drawings representing their memories from their summer holidays. During the activity, students presented their artwork to their peers and described their experiences and emotions in English. OPT01 guided the discussions with reflective prompts such as, *"What made this moment special for you?"* and *"How did this experience help you grow?"* This activity successfully

fostered not only language proficiency (with a focus on the past simple and continuous tenses) but also SECs like self-awareness by encouraging students to reflect on their personal experiences and articulate their feelings. It also promoted social awareness and relationship skills as students listened to and appreciated their friends' stories.

OPT01 also implemented a *Reflection* activity to encourage self-reflection: *"Students were asked to write about their feelings during the lesson. They could write about any challenges they faced and how they overcame them. OPT01 provided questions like, 'How did today's lesson make you feel? What was difficult for you and how did you manage those feelings?'"* This activity proved to be effective for students who preferred private forms of self-expression. However, *"OPT01 didn't offer a follow-up discussion for students to share and discuss these feelings"* This follow-up discussion could have enhanced self-awareness, social awareness and other related skills.

These creative and reflective tasks demonstrate their potential to develop SECs like self-awareness, empathy and emotional regulation. Despite the success of these activities, they were quite rare across sessions of classroom observations. This signifies the need for targeted training to help pre-service EFL teachers design and execute more creative and reflective activities to foster SECs effectively during their teaching practices.

Role-playing and simulation

Role-playing activities were observed as an effective strategy for integrating language acquisition with the development of social emotional skills such as empathy, interpersonal skills and conflict resolution. OPT07 organized a *role-play on the topic of environment protection*, where students could practice polite language, perspective-taking, respect and active listening to enhance their self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. As remarked in the fieldnote: *"This activity encouraged students to consider appropriate social behaviors in different contexts, helping them connect language use with real-life situations."* Similarly, OPT10 organized a simulation of a trip abroad, which promoted cultural understanding, negotiation and appreciation for diverse perspectives: *"Students need to foster empathy and an understanding of different cultures to accomplish this task."*

OPT06 also effectively utilized role-play to enhance both language and social emotional skills: *"OPT06 used role-playing to help students practice communication skills in real-world contexts, which also encouraged empathy and problem-solving."* However, *"without specific instructions or role expectations, some students failed to fully take part in the conversation."* This highlights the importance of providing structured guidelines and well-defined roles to maximize student engagement and participation, and to support the development of important SECs like empathy, collaboration and communication.

Debating activities

Debate activities proved to be a valuable strategy for fostering language fluency and SECs among students. For example, OPT04 organized a debate on environmental solutions. *"During the debate, she motivated them to listen attentively to their partners and respond with thoughtfulness."* This activity offered students a platform to not only develop language fluency but also practice SECs such as empathy, active listening, turn-taking and emotional regulation. However, many students were hesitant to participate in the debate. This lack of engagement was not simply a linguistic challenge but also a social-emotional issue, possibly related to limited self-awareness, self-management and social awareness or relationship skills. To enhance student engagement, OPT04 should have used more social and emotional strategies.

In another instance, OPT09 also faced challenges in conducting a debate activity: *"Students were divided into teams, but some students dominated the conversation and others remained silent. OPT09 didn't intervene to ensure balanced participation or provide strategies for the quieter students to engage."* This resulted in missed opportunities for students to develop self-awareness, social awareness and relationship skills. Similarly, OPT10 had difficulties during a group discussion activity, where students were expected to collaborate but lacked clear guidance: *"The students were left to figure out the task on their own and some groups appeared confused. OPT10 didn't provide clear guidance on how to work in group discussions or manage conflicts."*

Project-based learning

Project-based learning (PBL) provides students with opportunities to integrate language skills into real-world applications, and it can also foster important SECs like social awareness, relationship skills, self-management and responsible-decision making. FIPT05 emphasized the role of PBL in cultivating self-management skills: *"Using project-based learning, students are given a project with a deadline, which requires them to manage their time and tasks effectively. They can develop skills like self-management and responsibility."* Similarly, FIPT08 highlighted the role of PBL in helping students manage time and set realistic goals: *"Through projects, students need to make action plans and manage their time effectively to accomplish the project."*

Collaboration was another important component of PBL. FIPT07 noted this benefit: *"In group projects, students have to communicate and assign tasks, which helps them build stronger relationships with their classmates."* This process also fostered social awareness as students learned to recognize and respect their peers' abilities and contributions. However, FIPT07 were concerned about the challenges in group work: *"There were some groups where students didn't communicate well and it caused frustration. One group even had a conflict over who was supposed to lead."*

Actually, OPT02 organized a project where students researched and delivered presentations on environmental issues. This project encouraged active participation and student ownership by requiring them to collaborate, conduct research, analyze information and present their findings. This project also encouraged critical thinking, teamwork and communication skills, making the language learning process more engaging and effective. However, the project lacked clear guidelines and instructions on how the group should work together, which led to inefficiencies in teamwork, uneven participation and confusion about task distribution.

Overall, PBL proved to be a powerful tool for fostering accountability, collaboration and self-management among students. However, pre-service EFL teachers need to provide more consistent guidance, set clear expectations and offered ongoing support to ensure that PBL can consistently foster both academic and social emotional skills.

Extensive reading activities

Reading activities emerged as effective tools for fostering self-awareness among students as these activities allow them to explore their personal traits, emotional growth and weaknesses to address. FIPT12 shared that she often implemented a *reading corner* to encourage extensive reading and self-reflection among her students. FIPT12 explained*: "I set up a reading corner where students could donate books, read books and reflect on what they read. It helped students understand themselves and others better through the characters they encountered and the situations they analyzed."* This demonstrates how reading activities can help students develop self-awareness, self-management and social awareness, especially the ability to identify and address their emotions, personal traits, values and perspectives.

Experiential learning and self-discovery

Experiential learning emerged as an important theme in the focus group interview. Pre-service EFL teachers highlighted how hands-on activities combined with personal reflection could enable students to uncover their strengths and weaknesses through active engagement, rather than passively receiving information. FIPT01 emphasized the huge benefits of experiential learning on developing SECs: *"The best way for students to realize their self-worth is through learning by doing, experiencing and reflecting on their own experiences, rather than being told what their values are."* This strategy could facilitate the development of SECs such as self-awareness and responsible decision-making alongside academic learning. FIPT04 expanded on this view: "Experiential learning could also foster self-discovery because students need to do *real-world tasks; they have to explore, make decisions and take responsibility for their learning process. This process requires self-reflection and personal discovery."*

Pair or group work

Pair or group work was frequently used by pre-service EFL teachers for fostering SECs such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making among their students during their teaching practices. These collaborative settings required students to share ideas, manage group tasks and make decisions collectively; therefore, they could provide practical opportunities for students to develop important interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (SECs). FIPT06 emphasized the role of group work in developing SECs: *"Group work allows students to recognize their self-awareness and develop skills like social awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making, especially when they can take on leadership roles."* In one classroom observation instance, it was also observed that *"the student, who was assigned the role of team leader, began taking initiative and helping other members do their tasks. He seemed to be more eager and confident"* [OPT01].

However, challenges such as uneven participation and conflicts within groups still exist. For example, in OPT05's group work activity, one student dominated and did most of the tasks while the others remained silent; however the pre-service teacher did not intervene. They tended to wait for task completion rather than the process of collaboration among students. They should have provided clear guidance or practical strategies to ensure that all the students can effectively collaborate and grow during group work. One pre-service teacher explained this issue: *"I often use group tasks, but I never thought about teaching them teamwork skills. It's just part of the activity"* *[FIPT04]*. This perspective suggests that pre-service teachers are capable of promoting SEL-related skills, but they do not treat these practices as deliberate efforts to cultivate these skills for students. Instead, SEL-related outcomes are treated as by-products of language learning tasks, not intentional goals.

Surveys and feedback

Surveys and feedback emerged as effective tools for understanding students' preferences, interests, social and emotional needs, which allows teachers to adapt their lessons to increase engagement and motivation. FIPT03 emphasized the value of using surveys to plan activities that align with students' interests such as outdoor events or music-related tasks: *"I design and distribute surveys to find out students' interests, like whether they enjoy going outdoors or listening to music, which helps in planning activities that align with their styles and preferences."* When taking student preferences into consideration, pre-service EFL teachers could encourage participation and emotional connection to the subject content. They could also create a supportive environment that fosters self-awareness, self-management and social awareness.

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Self-management techniques

Pre-service EFL teachers also shared that they taught self-management techniques such as self-discipline organization and time management for their students. FIPT03 emphasized using daily task lists and time management principles to guide students in organizing their activities and prioritizing tasks. She shared, *"I teach students to create daily task lists and prioritize their tasks using time management techniques. These techniques help them build routines and habits for better self-management."* Similarly, FIPT09 highlighted the importance of setting clear time limits: *"I encourage students to set deadlines for their tasks. This helps them avoid wasting time and keeps them on track."* These techniques prepare students to effectively manage workloads, balance responsibilities and improve their ability to meet deadlines and stay focused.

The findings show that pre-service EFL teachers were most competent in designing activities that could foster SECs; however, they rarely turned these into explicit SEL learning opportunities. Instead, SECs development remained largely incidental or secondary to the primary language-learning goals. Interactive games, reflective tasks and collaborative projects could foster engagement, teamwork and emotional expression; however, their impact was often limited due to lack of explicit focus, inconsistent facilitation, lack of clear guidelines and insufficient follow-up reflections. Consequently, students failed to recognize, develop and apply SECs intentionally in meaningful learning tasks. This reflects a gap in the teacher education program, where SEL integration is implicit and unstructured, leaving pre-service teachers without the tools to teach SECs intentionally.

6.2.6. SELIC 5 - Assessing students' SECs

Assessing students' SECs is an important yet overlooked component of SEL instructional competence. Observations reveal that pre-service EFL teachers primarily focused on academic objectives, and often neglected to evaluate or reflect on students' SECs. Even though they implemented activities that could naturally foster SECs, they rarely addressed and assessed these skills.

In one instance, students took part in a role-playing activity, which could help them express emotions, perspectives and develop social strategies. However, *"after the role-play activity, students quickly moved on to the next task without a debrief. OPT08 did not ask students to reflect on how they felt during the role-play or what they learned about their emotional reactions."* Similarly, *"OPT05 facilitated a group discussion on the most important inventions, allowing students to debate different perspectives. However, there was no structured reflection afterward to assess whether students understood their classmates' perspectives."* In another case, students were asked to set personal learning goals at the beginning of the unit. However, OPT03 did not revisit

these goals or track student progress over time. Without deliberate and structured assessments, students may have missed opportunities to reinforce their SECs.

During OPT07's grammar lesson, students worked individually on exercises, but no effort was made to assess their emotional engagement. The field notes recorded: *"Although students completed the task, the teacher didn't check on their emotional engagement or how they felt about the activity."* Similarly, in OPT02's group discussion activity, one student appeared visibly disengaged, but the teacher did not intervene. The fieldnotes recorded: *"The student appeared uncomfortable during the group activity, but no effort was made by the teacher to assess or provide support."* These examples demonstrate missed opportunities to assess and address students' emotional well-being, which could have enhanced their learning experience and SECs.

The focus group interview confirmed this lack of attention to social and emotional assessments. FIPT03 remarked: *"We focus on getting through the academic content and it's easy to forget that students are dealing with social and emotional issues that may affect their learning significantly."* This statement emphasizes how the emphasis on academic achievement often overshadows the need to address the social and emotional dimensions of language learning. Additionally, FIPT07 noted: *"We haven't been trained on how to assess things like emotional health or social skills. We focus more on academic progress, but I agree that emotions and social factors play a big part in learning."* This highlights a systemic gap in teacher training, where assessing SECs is not prioritized or integrated explicitly enough, leaving pre-service EFL teachers unprepared to assess and address their students' SECs.

In summary, assessment stands out as the weakest component of SEL instructional competence. This gap reflects both a lack of training in SEL assessment tools and the exam-oriented nature of the educational system. To fill this gap, pre-service EFL teachers need targeted training in how to use intentional SECs assessment tools such as self-reflection, rubrics and peer evaluations in their teaching practices, and then how to use the assessment data to adapt teaching methods.

6.3. Variations in SEL practices among pre-service EFL teachers

This section examines variations in SEL practices across different demographic and academic groups, focusing on three variables: academic achievement, gender and year of training. The findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors shaping SEL practices among pre-service EFL teachers.

A notable theme that emerged from the interviews is the significant variations in SEC levels across different groups of pre-service EFL teachers. ITT01 highlighted this disparity: *"Some groups are very good, but there are groups that lag far behind."* This observation suggests that certain groups excel in SECs, but others cannot meet basic

expectations. ITT05 reinforced this trend: "*There's a big range. There are some who are excellent, some who are poor.*" This variation is especially evident in group activities, where stronger pre-service EFL teachers tend to take the lead but weaker pre-service EFL teachers remain passive and quiet. ITT02 also observed this disparity in group work: "*Some groups are very active and enthusiastic; they always look for ways to improve their presentations, but many others rely on others to do the work.*" This reliance on a few proactive members limits the development of SECs for the less engaged pre-service teachers, who miss opportunities to practice and develop important social and emotional skills like goal-setting, empathy, problem-solving, decision-making and collaboration.

Pre-service EFL teachers with stronger SECs often take on leadership roles, as ITT03 noted: "*These pre-service teachers have a wide network of relationships. They know who to turn to for help when they face challenges and are often willing to volunteer as group leaders.*" These initiative and leadership qualities reflect that they possess strong SECs like self-awareness and relationship skills, which allow them to connect with peers and lead groups effectively. This proactive behavior contrasts sharply with the passivity observed in pre-service teachers with weaker SECs, who, according to ITT02, "*keep silent throughout the group work process, rely on others and rarely share or exchange ideas with their peers.*" This reluctance to participate in group work may hinder their overall academic, social emotional development.

The quantitative findings support this qualitative finding, as can be seen in Table 22. The big range of scores for all the five core SECs shows that there are significant variations among pre-service EFL teachers, with the full range (1 to 5) recorded for SEM, SOA and RDM and slightly narrower ranges for SEA and RES (1.40 to 5.00). To further validate these variations, more advanced qualitative and quantitative analysis was conducted, as presented in the following sections.

6.3.1. SECs levels by academic achievement

The interviews reveal a strong correlation between pre-service EFL teachers' academic achievements and their SECs. ITT04 emphasized that academically successful pre-service teachers tend to demonstrate stronger self-management and responsible decision-making skills: "*pre-service teachers with strong academic performance or leadership roles in class tend to make more responsible decisions. Those who perform well academically also tend to have better self-management skills.*" Similarly, ITT04 pointed out that academically strong pre-service teachers also possess higher self-awareness: "*They know their strengths and weaknesses and are able to showcase their strengths more clearly through learning activities.*" This link between academic performance and SECs highlights the reciprocal nature of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. It reinforces the idea that pre-service EFL teachers with better SECs tend to excel academically.

6.3.2. SECs and SEL instructional competence levels by gender

Regarding gender, interestingly, ITT04 noted that it shows no clear relationship with pre-service teachers' SEC levels: "*I don't see any gender differences in their SECs. Instead, I notice more evident differences based on academic ability."* This finding challenges common assumptions about gender differences in social-emotional skills. The ANOVA results displayed in Table 29 supports this qualitative finding: there is no statistically significant difference in SECs of pre-service EFL teachers by gender. The significance values for each SEC are all above the standard threshold of .05, confirming that there is no significant difference in SECs based on gender.

Table 29

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Level of SEL Competencies by Gender

ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η^2 (Eta Squared)	Interpretation of Sig. and η^2 values
Self-awareness	.141	2	.070	.189	.828		No difference
Self-management	.053	2	.026	.072	.930		No difference
Social awareness	1.206	2	.603	1.901	.151		No difference
Relationship skills	.831	2	.415	1.113	.330		No difference
Responsible decision-making	.324	2	.162	.468	.627		No difference
SEL instructional competence	**1.132**	**2**	**.566**	**3.621**	**.028**	**.002**	**Small**

However, ANOVA results reveal significant difference in SEL instructional competence, with p-value less than .05. This value indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in SEL instructional competence between male and female pre-service EFL teachers. In other words, gender might play a role in how pre-service EFL teachers implement SEL in their teaching practices. To quantify the magnitude of this difference, effect size was calculated using eta squared (η^2). The analysis reveals a very small effect size, with an eta squared (η^2) value of only .002. This result suggests that gender shows no clear relationship with personal SECs, but demonstrates a significant association with SEL instructional competence.

6.3.3. SECs and SEL instructional competence levels by training year

Coming to the training year, the interview data consistently reveal that SECs improve as pre-service EFL teachers progress through the training program. ITT04 observed the obvious contrast between first-year and final-year pre-service teachers: "*I see a significant change in the SECs of pre-service teachers from when they first entered university to when they are about to graduate... Through their studies and practical activities, their competencies have developed to a new level."* This assessment indicates that although SECs development is a gradual process, the most noticeable improvements occur in the final year of the training program. This is likely due to increased exposure to real-world challenges during internships or practicum experiences, which demand more advanced social and emotional skills.

ITT03 also remarked on this gradual development: *"Self-management and personal responsibility among first-year pre-service EFL teachers are generally weak when they first start university."* This observation emphasizes the difficulties many first-year pre-service EFL teachers face as they transition from the structured environment of high school to the more independent environment of university. They may find it hard to manage their time, balance responsibilities and manage academic tasks. ITT04 further emphasized the strong development of SECs seen in final-year pre-service EFL teachers: *"As they prepare to graduate, their sense of responsibility, self-awareness, self-management and ability to make responsible decisions improve significantly."* The practical demands of the final year push pre-service EFL teachers to refine their SECs to prepare them for professional teaching roles. ITT01 supported this view and explained that by the third and fourth years, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate *"marked improvements in self-management and decision-making".*

Pre-service EFL teachers also recognized the positive impact of training on their SECs, especially self-management: *"I think my self-management skills are now at level 4, but I've only recently reached this level. When conducting student scientific research, I realized I had been very undisciplined and used to procrastinate a lot. Since then, I have become more consistent in everything I do, including studying and taking care of my health"* [FIPT04]. This reflection illustrates how specific experiences, like research projects, can positively impact self-management skills.

The ANOVA results, as shown in Table 30, confirm these qualitative findings. Training year had a statistically significant effect on three out of the five core SECs: self-management ($p<.001$, $\eta^2=.064$), relationship skills ($p=.004$, $\eta^2=.038$), and responsible decision-making ($p=.007$, $\eta^2=.035$). The eta squared values for these competencies suggest small to medium effect sizes, indicating that progression through the teacher education program contributes meaningfully to the development of these SECs. Notably, self-management gains the highest effect size, suggesting that emotional regulation and behavior management skills could be cultivated over time. These findings align with the qualitative data, where teacher trainers observed remarkable improvements in these competencies, especially in later years.

In contrast, no significant differences were found across training years for self-awareness ($p=.199$), social awareness ($p=.391$) and SEL instructional competence ($p=.214$). In other words, these competencies remain relatively stable throughout the program, showing no notable association with the training received. The most concerning finding is related to SEL instructional competence, which does not show any significant improvement across training years ($p=.214$). The lack of improvement in SEL instructional competence, self-awareness and social awareness indicate a notable gap in the EFL teacher education program that needs to be addressed by revising the curriculum design to ensure balanced, comprehensive development in both SECs and SEL instructional competence.

Table 30

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Level of SEL Competencies by Training Year

ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η² (Eta Squared)	Interpretation of Sig. and η² values
Self-awareness	1.721	3	.574	1.558	.199		No difference
Self-management	8.142	3	2.714	7.937	**.000**	**.064**	Medium
Social awareness	.957	3	.319	1.003	.391		No difference
Relationship skills	4.929	3	1.643	4.545	**.004**	**.038**	Small to Medium
Responsible decision-making	4.189	3	1.396	4.156	**.007**	**.035**	Small to Medium
SEL instructional competence	.709	3	.236	1.500	.214		No difference

In summary, the findings reveal different levels of proficiency in SECs and SEL instructional competence across groups of pre-service EFL teachers. Higher SECs correlate with stronger academic performance. Progression through the training program is also associated with higher levels of SECs, with notable improvements in self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making by later years; however, self-awareness, social awareness and SEL instructional competence remain relatively stable. It is noticeable that gender shows no statistically significant associations with pre-service EFL teachers' practices in the five core SECs, but it does demonstrate a notable relationship with SEL instructional competence, suggesting potential variations in how male and female pre-service EFL teachers apply SEL instructional skills in their teaching practices.

6.4. Correlations among SECs and SEL instructional competence

This section analyzes statistical and qualitative evidence of how the five core SECs relate to one another and how they correlate with SEL instructional competence. The findings indicate that the five core personal SECs are strongly interconnected, but their correlations with SEL instructional competence are much weaker, highlighting the challenge of translating personal competencies into instructional practices.

6.4.1. Moderate correlations among the five core SECs

The analysis of pre-service teachers' responses during the focus group interview reveals significant correlations among SECs. FIPT05 highlighted the interconnection between self-awareness and self-management: *"When setting plans, one must recognize whether they can achieve them and if not, how to adjust workload and time appropriately."* This response suggests that effective self-regulation is based on a clear understanding of one's abilities. FIPT02 emphasized that self-awareness and self-management provide a foundation for other SECs. Self-awareness enables self-management, which subsequently promotes social awareness and relationship skills. Both FIPT03 and FIPT01 outlined a progression in SECs development, where intrapersonal competencies like self-awareness and self-management act as prerequisites to interpersonal skills such

as decision-making and social awareness: *"For a language learner, self-awareness comes first, followed by self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and finally social awareness."*

Correlation analysis reveals both convergence and divergence between qualitative and quantitative findings regarding the five core SECs practiced by pre-service EFL teachers. Table 31 shows the strong interconnectedness among these competencies, with all correlations significant at the .01 level. The strongest correlation is between Self-Awareness and Self-Management (r=.556), which indicates that self-awareness is essential for effective self-regulation in the classroom. Similarly, the correlation between responsible decision-making and social awareness (r=.511) indicates that empathy fosters ethical decision-making. These moderate correlations among SECs confirm the holistic and interdependent nature of social emotional competencies. It also suggests that each competency supports the others and improvements in one competence can have a positive effect on the others. These quantitative findings align with qualitative findings from pre-service EFL teachers, who emphasize the strong link among the five core SECs.

Table 31
Correlations between SECs and SEL Instructional Competence

Pearson Correlations (r)								
		Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills	Decision-Making	Five Core SECs	SEL Instructional Competence
Self-Awareness	r	1	.556**	.435**	.397**	.460**		.255**
Self-Management	r	.556**	1	.407**	.555**	.453**		.193**
Social Awareness	r	.435**	.407**	1	.422**	.511**		.259**
Relationship Skills	r	.397**	.555**	.422**	1	.458**		.319**
Decision-Making	r	.460**	.453**	.511**	.458**	1		.266**
Five Core SECs	r	.756**	.789**	.725**	.753**	.759**	1	.342**
SEL Instructional Competence	r	.255**	.193**	.259**	.319**	.266**		1
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). N=351								

However, in the focus group interview, several pre-service EFL teachers mentioned the possible negative correlation between intrapersonal skills (self-awareness and self-management) and interpersonal skills (social awareness and relationship skills). They noted that although strong self-awareness and self-management foster independence and responsibility, they can sometimes hinder relationship skills. FIPT06, for instance, remarked:*"My self-awareness and self-management is already very good, so I don't often seek help from other people. I can manage everything myself; I don't want to rely on external relationships."* FIPT03 expressed the same view: *"I often have to do everything myself because I don't trust others."* These statements highlight an unexpected challenge: a lack of trust in others and over-reliance on self-sufficiency may hinder social awareness and relationship skills. Contrary to this qualitative finding, the quantitative data reveal quite strong positive correlations among all the five SECs.

6.4.2. Weaker correlations between SECs and SEL instructional competence practices

As can be seen in Table 31, the correlations between SEL instructional competence and the five core SECs are relatively weak compared to the correlations among the five core SECs themselves (r=.342). The highest correlation is between relationship skills and SEL instructional competence (r=.319). It means that pre-service EFL teachers who are effective in relationship skills are more likely to demonstrate SEL instructional competence in their teaching practices. The weakest correlation is between self-management and SEL instructional competence (r=.193). This very weak correlation suggests that managing emotions and behaviors independently has a minimal direct impact on SEL instructional competence. Other SECs such as social awareness (r=.259), self-awareness (r=.255) and responsible decision-making (r=.266) show only moderate correlations with SEL instructional competence.

These relatively weak correlation values indicate that although SECs provide an essential foundation for SEL instructional competence, the factors contributing to successful SEL instructional competence practices go beyond basic personal SECs. Qualitative data supports this quantitative finding. Although pre-service EFL teachers self-assess their SECs at high level, many feel unprepared to apply SEL in teaching practices effectively: *"I think it's not enough. I need more experience. I self-assess my SECs at level 4, but having these skills is different from being able to teach them"* [FIPT02].

SEL instructional competence practices involve applying SEL principles in a pedagogical context, which includes applying foundational psychological and pedagogical theories, designing SEL activities, assessing students' SECs, and modeling SECs effectively in the classroom. Pre-service EFL teachers consistently expressed challenges in integrating SEL principles into their teaching practices due to limited explicit training and practical experiences. In general, these findings suggest that personal SECs alone do not predict SEL instructional competence; additional factors such as pedagogical and psychological knowledge, knowledge of SEL, the ability to name, model, teach and assess SECs likely to play a more significant role in the practices of SEL instructional competence.

6.5. Influence of the Teacher Education Program on SEL Perceptions and Practices

This section investigates how the teacher education program correlates with pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL. First, mean comparisons across the three domains of training, perceptions and practices provide an overview of their relative emphasis; then regression and correlational analyses explore the relationships among them. Complemented by qualitative data, these statistical analyses demonstrate how the teacher education programme shapes SEL perceptions and practices.

6.5.1. Comparisons of average scores across perceptions, practices and training

Table 32 provides a descriptive analysis and one-sample t-tests comparing the average scores across perceptions, practices and training in SEL. The results indicate noticeable

differences between these variables. Pre-service teachers reported generally positive perceptions of SEL, with a high mean score of 3.96, significantly above the neutral midpoint of 3. This high level of agreement, coupled with a low standard deviation (SD=.430), suggests a shared recognition of SEL's values among the pre-service teachers. However, the mean scores for practices, including SECs (3.67) and SEL instructional competence (3.34), are lower, while training in SECs (3.62) and SEL instructional competence (3.42) shares the same pattern. In interviews, some pre-service teachers acknowledged this gap: *"I know SEL is important, but I don't always know how to bring it into my teaching"* [FIPT06]; *"Sometimes I just focus on finishing the lesson plan, and forget all about social or emotional factors"* [FIPT02]. This gap suggests that although pre-service teachers value SEL, translating these positive perceptions into concrete practices requires further support and training.

Table 32

Comparison of Average Scores across Perceptions, Practices and Training

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t(df)	p	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Perceptions of SEL	2.43	4.90	3.96	.430	.75835	29.495	< .001	.7078 – .8089
Practice in SECs	1.56	4.95	3.67	.450	.67090	27.942	< .001	.6237 – .7181
Practice in SEL instructional competence	1.00	3.80	3.34	.398	.34131	16.074	< .001	.2995 – .3831
Training in SECs	1.43	5.00	3.62	.588	.61584	19.621	< .001	.5541 – .6776
Training in SEL instructional competence	1.00	4.60	3.42	.636	.41766	12.298	< .001	.3509 – .4845
Prepared for SEL	1.00	4.60	3.33	.568	.32536	10.741	< .001	.2658 – .3849
N=351; Test value = 3 = Neutral Midpoint; df=350								

The comparison between pre-service teachers' practices in SECs and SEL instructional competence also indicates a significant disparity. The data reveals that pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated stronger personal competencies (3.67) compared to their instructional competence (3.34). This disparity indicates that although they are relatively good at applying social emotional skills, they are less proficient in teaching and modeling these skills for their students. The narrower range of scores for SEL instructional competence (1.00 to 3.80) compared to SECs (1.56 to 4.95) may indicate more consistent but limited proficiency in instructional competence.

When it comes to SEL training, a comparison between training in SECs and SEL instructional competence also reveals a more emphasis on personal SECs than instructional competence. The mean score for training in SECs (3.62) is noticeably higher than that for SEL instructional competence (3.42). This suggests that the training program tends to focus more on developing personal SECs rather than equipping pre-service EFL teachers with the skills necessary to integrate SEL into their teaching

practices. This helps explain why their practices in SECs tend to be stronger than SEL instructional competence. This gap, again, indicates the need for more training to ensure that pre-service teachers can translate their personal SECs into the ability to teach SEL.

6.5.2. Relationships among perceptions, practices and training

This section explores the statistical correlations among perceptions, practices and training, complemented by qualitative data that illustrates how training shaped participants' attitudes and classroom behaviors. Table 33 shows these correlations, with all being statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 33
Correlations among Perceptions, Practices and Training in SEL

Pearson Correlations (r)					
		Perceptions of SEL	Practices in SEL	Training in SEL	Preparedness for SEL
Perceptions of SEL	r	1			
Practices in SEL	r	.437**	1		
Training in SEL	r	.478**	.564**	1	
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). N=351					

Training plays a moderate but significant role in shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions of SEL (r=.478). Those who experienced greater exposure to SEL-related training, whether implicitly or explicitly, tended to report higher awareness, understanding and appreciation of SEL. Training in SEL shows a stronger correlation with practices in SEL (r=.564). It means that training plays an important role in promoting the practices of SEL (both SECs and SEL instructional competence) among pre-service EFL teachers. The relationship between perceptions and practices is weaker compared to training (r=.437), indicating that positive perceptions alone are insufficient to drive implementation but requires more structured training.

In short, training plays the central role in enhancing both SEL perceptions and practices among pre-service EFL teachers. Although positive perceptions of SEL are beneficial, they must be complemented by targeted training to translate SEL into effective classroom practices. Therefore, teacher education programs need to offer more explicit training, hands-on practices and experiential learning opportunities to strengthen the connection between training, perceptions and practices to ensure that pre-service teachers are fully equipped in knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement SEL successfully in their future classrooms.

Regression analysis was also conducted to examnine how various factors such as training and perceptions predict SEL practices. The regression model (see Table 34) indicates a strong relationship between the predictors (Perceptions and Training) and the dependent variable (Practices in SEL), with an R value of .711 and an R² value of .506. These values

indicate that the predictors collectively explain 5.6% of the variance in SEL practices. In other words, pre-service teachers' perceptions and the training they received significantly predicted how they practised SEL. The low standard error of the estimate (.25198) suggests that the model's predictions are reasonably accurate, and the Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.003 confirms no significant autocorrelation in the residuals. However, the remaining unexplained variance of 49.4% indicates the potential influence of other factors. Further research, therefore, is needed to identify additional predictors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what contributes to effective SEL practices among pre-service teachers.

Table 34
Regression Analysis of Key Factors Predicting SEL Practices

Model Summary[b]					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.711[a]	.506	.474	.25198	2.003
a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceptions of SEL, Training in SEL, Prepared for SEL					
b. Dependent Variable: Practice in SEL					

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	21.360	21	1.017	16.020	.000[b]
1	Residual	2.889	329	.063		
	Total	42.249	350			
a. Dependent Variable: Practices in SEL						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceptions of SEL, Training in SEL, Preparedness for SEL						

The ANOVA table indicates the significance and explanatory power of the regression model. The higher mean square for regression (1.017) compared to residuals (.063) indicates that the predictors explain much of the variance although considerable unexplained variance remains (2.889 out of 42.249 total). The highly significant F-statistic (16.020, $p = .000$) confirms that the predictors significantly enhance the model's explanatory power. In other words, SEL training and perceptions play an important role in shaping SEL practices.

The diagnostic tests for regression residuals, including the histogram, normal P-P plot, and scatter plot, collectively confirm that the model predicting practices in SEL is statistically robust and reliable. The histogram (Figure 22) shows a near-normal distribution with a mean close to zero and no extreme outliers, while the P-P plot (Figure 23) indicates that residuals closely follow the diagonal line, meeting the assumption of normality. Similarly, the scatter plot (Figure 24) reveals that residuals are randomly and consistently dispersed around zero with no systematic patterns, affirming both linearity and homoscedasticity. Together, these findings demonstrate that the regression model fits the data well, with no evidence of bias or violation of assumptions, thereby validating the reliability of the results linking training and perceptions to practices in SEL.

Figure 22
Histogram of Regression Standardized Residuals

Histogram
Dependent Variable: TBpracticeSEL
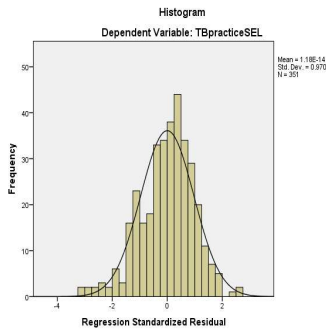
Figure 23
Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: TBpracticeSEL
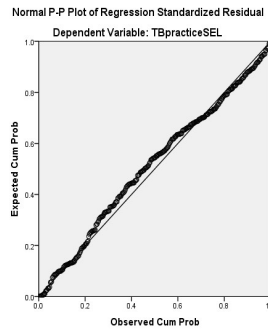
Figure 24
Scatterplot of Regression Standardized Residuals

Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: TBpracticeSEL
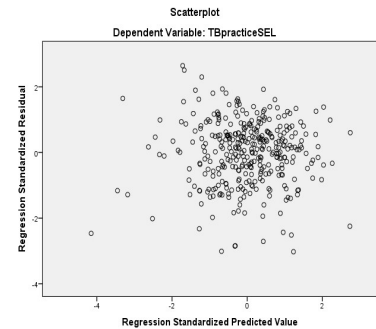
Chapter Summary

This chapter has evaluated the pre-service EFL teachers' practices in SEL. They demonstrate moderate-to-high proficiency in SECs while their practices in SEL instructional competence are just moderate, varied and often implicit. Another important finding is the significant correlations among training, perceptions and practices in SEL, which indicate that comprehensive SEL training could positively shape understanding, attitudes and practices in SEL. These findings collectively reveal both the strengths and limitations of current SEL training within Vietnamese EFL teacher education as described in Chapter 4. Although pre-service EFL teachers possess foundational SEL competencies, recognize its importance and attempt to integrate it into their teaching practices, the program's fragmented approach and lack of explicit instruction limit their formal knowledge and ability to implement SEL consistently and purposefully.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will first summarize the major findings of the study, with a specific focus on the perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers at a pedagogical university in Vietnam. It will then discuss these findings in relation to the research questions, relate them to existing literature, and contextualize them within Vietnam's sociocultural and educational context. This discussion provides a strong foundation for making practical recommendations for advancing SEL training in teacher education. The chapter will also acknowledge the limitations of the study and propose directions for future research before coming to the final conclusion.

7.1. Summary of the Main Findings

This study explored the perceptions and practices of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers during their professional learning at a pedagogical university in Vietnam, focusing on three interrelated dimensions: perceptions and classroom practices as well as the influence of the program on these aspects. A mixed methods sequential exploratory research design was employed, combining document analysis, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and questionnaire. Analysis of these multiple data sources reveals the following major findings, as summarized in Figure 25 in relation to the conceptual framework.

Figure 25
Summary of the Main Findings of the Study

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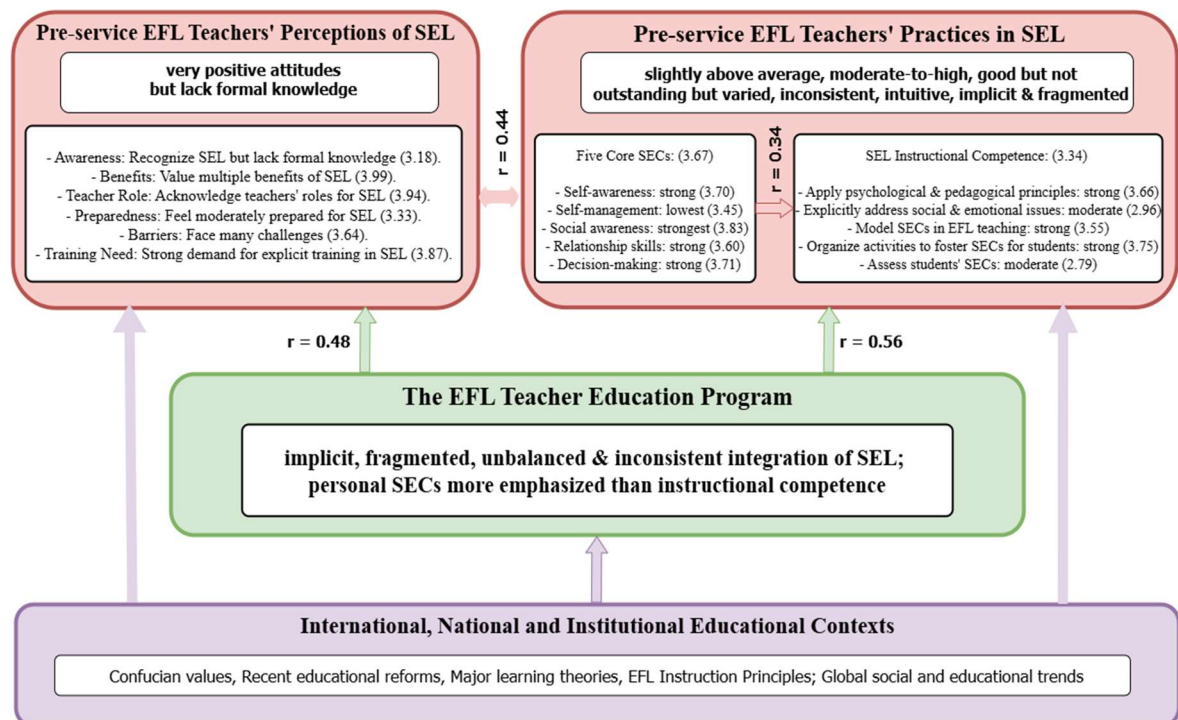
Firstly, regarding SEL training, although SECs are highly present within the curriculum (3.62), the emphasis across the five core SECs is mostly implicit, uneven, fragmented and inconsistent. Self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making are much more emphasized than self-awareness and social awareness. Similarly, the emphasis across the five components of SEL instructional competence is also moderate, uneven and mostly implicit (3.42). Pre-service EFL teachers receive more training in psychology and pedagogy (3.82), modeling SECs in teaching practices (3.60) and organizing activities to foster SECs (3.48), but limited training in explicit SEL instruction (3.06) and on assessing students' SECs (2.94). As a result, pre-service teachers' exposure to SEL training relies mainly on implicit individual lecturer's modelling, commitment and incidental learning opportunities rather than intentional instruction. This training context is found to be associated with differences in pre-service teachers' training experiences, perceptions and practices of SEL.

When it comes to perceptions, they reflect a positive orientation but incomplete knowledge, shaped largely by the implicit nature of SEL within the training program. They highly appreciate its multiple benefits (3.99) and also recognize the multiple roles of EFL teachers in not only delivering language instruction but also fostering students' SECs (3.94). However, their limited formal knowledge (3.18) and lack of preparedness for SEL (3.33) point out significant gaps in the training program. They exhibit limited familiarity with SEL as a formal concept although they often recognize its basic elements in the curriculum. Their interpretations of SEL demonstrate familiarity with fundamental aspects of SEL, but vary significantly and lack a full understanding of SEL's broader goals. Their knowledge of SEL is largely intuitive and experiential rather than informed by formal training. Recognizing these limitations, they strongly expressed the need for more structured, explicit SEL training (3.87) to develop SEL-related skills to effectively implement SEL in their teaching practices.

The findings on SEL practices reveal that they were present but mostly implicit, intuitive, fragmented, inconsistent, unintentional and unguided. Qualitative data rate pre-service teachers' SECs as slightly above average, with some demonstrating much stronger SECs than others. Quantitative data supports these findings, showing moderate-to-high self-assessed SECs (3.67), with social awareness rated highest (3.83) and self-management lowest (3.85). Similar patterns were seen in SEL instructional competence. Pre-service teachers also demonstrated moderate-to-high proficiency (3.34), with notable strengths in applying psychological and pedagogical principles (3.66), organizing activities that promote SECs (3.75) and modeling SECs (3.55) for students, though these practices are mostly implicit rather than explicitly linked to SEL. However, challenges remain in the explicit use of SEL concepts in teaching practices (2.96) and in assessing students' SECs (2.79). This gap suggests that although pre-service teachers recognize the importance of

SEL and attempt to incorporate it in their practices, they may lack adequate training in formal SEL theories, teaching and assessment methods to implement SEL effectively.

There are notable variations in SECs and SEL instructional competence across different groups of pre-service EFL teachers. Those with higher SECs tend to achieve better academic performance. As they progress through their training program, their SECs improve significantly, especially in self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making; however, self-awareness, social awareness and SEL instructional competence remain relatively stable over time. Gender shows no significant association with all of the five core SECs, but it is associated with SEL instructional competence. Correlation analysis indicates strong interconnections among the five core SECs but weaker correlation between SECs and SEL instructional competence, suggesting that while SECs develop collectively, they are only modestly associated with SEL instructional competence. This weak correlation also implies that for pre-service EFL teachers to implement SEL effectively in teaching practices, they need training in not only personal SECs, but also other instructional skills such as applying foundational pedagogical and psychological principles, using SEL concepts explicitly, organizing SEL activities and assessing students' SECs.

Correlation and regression analyses also confirm the interconnectedness of SEL training, perceptions and practices. Correlation analysis reveals moderate relationship between perceptions of SEL and actual practices in SEL (r=.44). In other words, pre-service teachers who perceive SEL positively are more likely to actively demonstrate SECs and integrate SEL into their teaching practices. Regression analysis results confirm these correlations, showing that perceptions of SEL and training in SEL collectively contribute significantly to SEL practices among pre-service EFL teachers (R square=.506). All of these positive correlations confirm the conceptual framework's assumptions about the interconnectedness of SEL training, perceptions and practices.

Finally, the findings indicate that SEL training is positively associated with pre-service teachers' perceptions (r=.48) and practices of SEL (r=.56), but primarily through implicit exposure. It provides pre-service teachers with a foundation for SEL, but one that is implicit, fragmented and inconsistently applied across competences, courses and teacher trainers. This training fosters positive attitudes and some intuitive practices, but it does not yet prepare them for thorough understanding and intentional, evidence-based practice of SEL in EFL teaching. These findings highlight a consistent pattern: although pre-service teachers are open and willing to implement SEL, their understanding and practices are constrained by the implicit and fragmented nature of training, leading to a gap between positive perceptions and limited practices.

7.2. Discussion of Major Findings

This section discusses the major findings of the study, focusing on the positive attitudes toward SEL, but fragmented understanding and intuitive practices among pre-service EFL teachers, as well as the implicit and fragmented nature of SEL training, which shapes these perceptions and practices. The discussion will also interpret the research findings within international literature, Vietnamese culture and educational reforms to identify both opportunities and challenges of promoting SEL in EFL teacher education.

7.2.1. Alignment of SEL with Vietnamese educational values and contexts

Findings of the current study reveal that SEL aligns with Vietnamese educational values and contexts, especially recent educational reforms and EFL instruction. Therefore, this discussion focuses on arguing that SEL can be naturally integrated into Vietnamese education in a manner that aligns with cultural values, traditional educational philosophies, recent reforms and modern methods. However, this reform requires systemic changes such as curriculum redesign, teacher training and policy adjustments as well as cultural adaptations (Hellman & Milling, 2020; Tran & Le, 2023).

7.2.1.1. Alignment of SEL with Vietnamese cultural and educational values

Although original SEL frameworks are developed in Western countries, EFL teacher trainers and pre-service teachers in the current study acknowledge its alignment with Vietnamese cultural and educational philosophies. This acknowledgement is particularly promising in the context of Vietnamese education as it suggests that SEL principles can be naturally merged with the deeply-ingrained Confucian moral, social and educational values of Vietnam. In other words, incorporating SEL into teacher education and classroom practices can build upon existing cultural and educational values without requiring drastic changes or causing cultural conflicts.

Historically, CHC education has been heavily influenced by heightened respect for hierarchical teacher–student relationships, expectation for moral virtues, social harmony, communal responsibility, and strong emphasis on academic achievements (Hu, 2002; Nguyen et al., 2006). On the surface, these traditional cultural values seem misaligned with SEL principles, which advocate for emotional intelligence, collaboration, conflict resolution and student-centered learning. However, a closer look reveals that SEL principles and Confucian values have significant similarities. Confucianism places a strong emphasis on moral virtues such as _"tu thân"_ (self-cultivation), _"kỷ luật"_ (discipline), _"khắc kỷ"_ (self-restraint) and _"chăm chỉ"_ (diligence), _"nhân"_ (benevolence), _"lễ"_ (propriety), and _"hòa"_ (harmony), _"hiếu"_ (filial piety) and _"nghĩa"_ (duty) (Jamieson, 2023; Taylor, 2002). All of these qualities align closely with SEL's goals of developing self-awareness, empathy, responsible decision-making and ethical conduct (CASEL, 2020). These shared values provide a cultural foundation for

integrating SEL into Vietnam in a way that not only respects but also revitalizes, contemporizes and expands the long-standing educational traditions of Vietnam.

An illustrative example of this alignment can be seen in the Vietnamese proverb *"Tiên học lễ, hậu học văn,"* which means *"First learn propriety, then learn literacy"* in English. This proverb has demonstrated the importance of moral education as the foundation for intellectual growth. SEL directly supports this principle as it can foster social competencies that reflect *"lễ"* (propriety) such as respect, empathy, self-discipline and responsible decision-making before moving on to academic learning (*"văn"*). SEL can even expand the scope of this traditional principle as it prioritizes the development of other skills such as self-expression, adaptability, conflict resolution, critical thinking and collaboration that have been underemphasized in CHC educational systems (Nguyen et al., 2006) to promote the holistic development of learners. Evidence from classroom observations and focus-group interview illustrates how these changes are already taking place in real classrooms, where both trainers and pre-service teachers embrace modern skills such as self-expression, conflict resolution and critical thinking.

SEL also aligns with the goals of recent Vietnamese educational reforms, which emphasizes five key qualities, namely patriotism (yêu nước), compassion (nhân ái), diligence (chăm chỉ), honesty (trung thực), and responsibility (trách nhiệm) and three general competencies, namely autonomy and self-learning, communication and collaboration, and problem-solving and creativity (MOET, 2018). These qualities and competencies map closely onto the CASEL framework. For example, communication and collaboration parallels relationship skills; autonomy and self-learning parallels self-awareness and self-management; and problem-solving and creativity parallels responsible decision-making.

Despite this promising alignment between SEL and Confucian values, challenges remain in fully integrating SEL into Vietnamese education. Confucian traditions tend to prioritize hierarchical relationships, rote memorization, passive learning, modesty, obedience, high-stakes exams and teacher-centered instruction, which may limit space for democratic classroom climate, student voice and agency, personal emotional expression, individual rights and needs, conflict resolution, open communication, critical thinking and interactive learning (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Saito et al. 2008; Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Taylor, 2002; Tanaka, 2020; Vu, 2022). These tensions require thoughtful and gradual adaptations of SEL to local contexts. This may involve contextualizing the five core SECs within Vietnamese socio-cultural contexts, educational practices and national policy directions, such as those emphasized in the 2018 General Education Curriculum (MOET, 2018; Tran & Le, 2023). This means honoring and preserving existing cultural traditions while gradually introducing innovations to ease potential cultural tensions and facilitate effective integration.

The acknowledgment that SEL aligns with Confucian values is especially promising in the context of Vietnam. This acknowledgment challenges the misperception that SEL is a Western construct that conflicts with CHC traditions. Instead, it highlights how SEL can build upon, modernize and enrich long-standing Confucian principles, fostering an educational environment that prioritizes not only academic success but also emotional intelligence and social competence. SEL provides a contemporary vocabulary and framework through which these values can be explicitly taught, practised and assessed in modern classrooms. This recognition will help mitigate any potential cultural tensions as well as resistance to SEL adoption, and encourages educators to implement SEL in a way that feels natural and meaningful rather than feeling imposed.

7.2.1.2. Alignment of SEL with recent educational reforms in Vietnam

Both teacher trainers and pre-service teachers perceive that SEL aligns with and supports recent educational reforms in Vietnam. The 2018 National Education Curriculum, which emphasizes competencies like critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and social responsibility, mirrors the core competencies of SEL (CASEL, 2020; MOET, 2018). Although the curriculum does not explicitly outline SEL skills, many of its objectives align with SEL principles. This alignment provides a fertile policy foundation for SEL integration in Vietnam. Moreover, the curriculum emphasizes SEL-related skills as integral, continuous components of the teaching and learning process. This perspective aligns with Pentón Herrera's (2021) assertion that SEL is *"a process, not a program"*, indicating that SEL needs to be embedded across all aspects of the curriculum.

Additionally, in an era dominated by Information Technology (IT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), where digital interactions often replace face-to-face communication, SEL, which emphasizes the emotional and social aspects of education, becomes even more urgent and fundamental (Downes, 2012; Siemens, 2005). As AI tools can perform complex cognitive and technical tasks, SEL becomes more urgent to equip teachers and students with skills that machines cannot replicate, such as resilience, compassion, empathy, creativity and critical thinking, which prepare them to live and work effectively in a constantly changing world (OECD, 2024).

The recognition by EFL teacher trainers and pre-service teachers of the alignment between SEL and Vietnam's recent educational reforms is a promising indicator of progressive educational change. Their acknowledgment demonstrates an increasing awareness of SEL as an essential component of modern education rather than an optional or foreign concept; therefore, it lays a strong foundation for embedding SEL into teacher training programs and classroom practices. As Vietnam transitions from a traditional rote learning model to a competency-based approach, this perception suggests a growing willingness to integrate SEL into EFL instruction to realize the holistic educational goals outlined in the 2018 National Education Curriculum (MOET, 2018).

7.2.1.3. Alignment of SEL with principles of EFL instruction

The findings of this study highlight the strong advocacy of EFL teacher trainers and pre-service teachers for integrating SEL into EFL classrooms. They acknowledge the alignment of SEL with EFL textbook contents and teaching methods, recognizing that SEL can enhance both language acquisition and holistic development. For example, many current English textbooks covered SEL-related issues like global warming, cultural identity, intergenerational relationships and well-being. These topics provide natural opportunities for developing SEL skills such as self-reflection, cooperation, empathy and ethical reasoning (MOET, 2018; Tran & Le, 2023). In addition, the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach, its active teaching methods (e.g. cooperative learning, inquiry-based instruction, project-based learning, task-based learning), and active teaching techniques (e.g. group discussion, debates, interviews, classroom surveys and role plays) already have the potential for fostering SEL skills like self-expression, interaction and collaboration.

Actually, SEL aligns closely with the inherently social and emotional dimensions of language teaching and learning (Krashen, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). Language acquisition is not only a cognitive process; it can be influenced by social interactions and emotional states. For example, Vygotsky (1989) emphasizes the roles of social factors in language learning, especially the roles of interaction, scaffolding, collaboration and cultural contexts. Meanwhile, emotional or affective factors can hinder or facilitate language learning (Krashen, 1982). Positive emotions such as enjoyment and confidence can facilitate cognitive processes and improve language acquisition; meanwhile, negative emotions such as fear, anxiety and frustration may impede and even block the progress (MacIntyre et al., 2019). SEL can boost positive emotions, minimize negative ones and create psychologically safe learning environments, which will enable students to take risks and engage more confidently in the learning process (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

Moreover, SEL aligns with and supports prevalent contemporary learning theories, including constructivism, cognitivism, social learning theory and humanism. SEL naturally complements constructivist views which emphasize active engagement, social interaction and experiential learning (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). SEL also complements cognitivism by supporting mental processes like emotional regulation, goal-setting, and decision-making (Bruner, 1960; Piaget, 1952). It also resonates with humanistic theories which stress emotional well-being, empathy and the holistic development of learners (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1969). These theoretical alignments provide fertile ground for integrating SEL into EFL teaching methodology.

However, it should be noted that SEL can also be meaningfully integrated into other school subjects, such as ethics, literature, civic education and history, where SEL-related themes are inherently present (Huynh et al., 2022; Tran & Le, 2023). When embedded

within these subjects, SEL can help Vietnamese education harmonize the academic, emotional and social aspects of learning to cultivate well-rounded learners and then citizens (OECD, 2024). However, currently these opportunities are often underutilized due to a lack of intentional planning, explicit instruction and structured reflection (Tran & Le, 2023), indicating the urgent need to train SEL instructional competence for teachers in how to activate and optimize these potentials so that everyday classroom activity can be turned into opportunities for holistic student development.

7.2.2. Perceptions of SEL: limited formal knowledge but positive attitudes

Findings from the study reveals that pre-service EFL teachers have limited formal understanding of SEL; however, they consistently expressed positive perceptions of its benefits in the EFL classroom. They also reported a lack of preparedness and significant barriers to implementing SEL in their teaching practices. Finally, they emphasized the need for targeted training in SECs and SEL instructional competence so that they can enhance their own SECs and implement SEL effectively in their classroom.

7.2.2.1. Pre-service EFL teachers' limited formal knowledge of SEL

The findings reveal significant gaps in pre-service EFL teachers' understanding of SEL. Their knowledge of SEL ranges from unfamiliarity with the term to fragmented and superficial interpretations. Although many recognized the social and emotional aspects of SEL, their understanding often excluded important aspects such as empathy, relationship building and responsible decision-making. This gap suggests an incomplete understanding of SEL's core domains and its holistic role in education. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that teachers often have limited formal knowledge of SEL; they often "do" SEL intuitively without formal training or a shared conceptual language (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009; Collie et al., 2015; Huck et al., 2023; Huynh et al., 2022).

Furthermore, pre-service teachers frequently confuse SEL with life skills education. This confusion reflects global critiques such as those by Farrington et al. (2012) and Duckworth and Yeager (2015), who are concerned about the confusion caused by inconsistent terminology and overlapping frameworks. Although both aim to enhance personal and social skills, SEL focuses specifically on developing and mobilizing interconnected skills like emotional regulation, empathy and ethical reasoning within the teaching and learning process (Denham et al. 2014; Markowitz et al., 2016). In contrast, life skills education encompasses a broader range of practical life skills such as self-care and problem-solving to prepare students for diverse real-life challenges (UNICEF, 2012). In other words, SEL is emphasized as an integral part of the teaching and learning process, whereas life skills education is often treated as supplementary or extra-curricular. This misconception may cause pre-service teachers to view SEL as an extracurricular activity rather than an integral part of their daily teaching practice. This

perspective prevents them from designing and implementing teaching practices that intentionally develop SECs in their students. This points to a pressing need for explicit SEL training to help pre-service teachers identify the unique features, goals and pedagogical applications of SEL.

The findings also indicate uneven familiarity with SEL's five core competencies (SECs). Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate some understanding of self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making, but their interpretations of social awareness and relationship skills were notably limited. This uneven understanding may result from a lack of explicit SEL training in teacher education programs, where SEL-related concepts are often vaguely embedded in broader courses such as pedagogy or educational psychology, without being explicitly labeled as SECs (Buchanan et al., 2009; Collie et al., 2015).

The contrast between the questionnaire and interview results confirms this lack of explicit instruction. On the questionnaire, the majority of pre-service teachers could select the correct definition of SEL, likely due to the predefined options. However, in interviews, where they were required to articulate their understanding without prompts, their responses were varied with gaps and inconsistencies. The findings suggest that much of pre-service EFL teachers' understanding of SEL is intuitive or based on their experiences rather than derived from a formal framework or explicit training. This intuitive understanding may suffice for basic classroom management but does not enable pre-service EFL teachers to design intentional, SEL-focused activities or integrate SEL principles systematically into their teaching practices.

In summary, the findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers' understanding of SEL is inconsistent and often superficial. These limitations are concerning in the context of EFL instruction, where social and emotional factors play a very important role (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dewaele et al., 2022; Pentón Herrera, 2020). To address these limitations, the EFL teacher education programs need to provide explicit training in SEL, provide clarity on SEL concepts and principles, distinguish it from related terms like life skills education and help pre-service teachers see SEL as both a process and a lens for teaching and learning (Markowitz et al., 2016; Huynh, 2019; Pentón Herrera, 2020). With a more comprehensive understanding of SEL, pre-service EFL teachers can integrate it effectively into their teaching practices.

7.2.2.2. Pre-service EFL teachers' positive perceptions of SEL

Despite their limited formal knowledge, pre-service EFL teachers at VPU hold strongly positive perceptions of SEL. They consistently emphasize SEL's multiple benefits in their personal, academic and professional life. These positive perceptions align closely with international studies by Durlak et al. (2011), Domitrovich et al. (2019), Sklad et al. (2012), Weissberg et al. (2015), Hoffman (2009), Bridgeland et al. (2013), Kautz et al.

(2014) and Jones & Kahn (2017). The alignment between these global findings and the views of Vietnamese pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate that SEL's benefits are acknowledged universally regardless of cultural contexts.

It is also interesting to note that pre-service EFL teachers at VPU regard fostering students' SECs as an essential aspect of their teaching job. They acknowledge their role as "second parents," who, according to the Vietnamese cultural view of teachers, are entrusted with not only imparting academic knowledge but also nurturing students' moral, social and emotional development (Jamieson, 2023; Taylor, 2002). This expectation means that Vietnamese teachers are placed at the heart of holistic student development, and SEL, therefore, can be regarded as a natural extension of their duty. This finding aligns with the view of scholars who contend that SECs are both the means and the end-products of educational processes, and that the schools and the teachers play an important role in these processes (Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Johnson & Wiener, 2017; Skald et al., 2012). However, this perspective contrasts with findings by Ee and Cheng (2013), who found that teachers in Singapore reported low responsibility for SEL. This contrast suggests that the extent to which teachers see themselves as responsible for students' SECs may vary across educational systems and cultural expectations.

This positive perception of SEL among pre-service EFL teachers is very meaningful in the Vietnamese context, where traditional education has historically prioritized academic achievement over the development of SECs (Tran & Le, 2023). These positive perceptions challenge the conventions by recognizing the importance of balancing cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and advocating for student holistic development. They reflect the willingness, receptiveness, openness and commitment of a new generation of teachers to adopt new educational approaches like SEL to foster student holistic development, contributing to the realization of the national educational goals.

7.2.2.3. Pre-service EFL teachers' perceived lack of preparedness for SEL

Despite recognizing the importance of SEL and the unique roles of EFL teachers in promoting SEL, pre-service EFL teachers at VPU reported a lack of preparedness for implementing SEL in their classrooms. This perceived lack of preparedness for SEL is concerning as it can lead to anxiety, uncertainty, hesitance and even avoidance to implement SEL. This concern is consistent with other research indicating that teachers often feel underprepared due to the lack of explicit SEL training (Boulton, 2014; Marlow & Inman, 2001; Thornton, 2023).

During the focus group interview, many pre-service EFL teachers expressed hesitation about their ability to implement SEL effectively in their teaching despite their confidence in possessing strong SECs. They acknowledged having SECs is not the same as being able to teach them for students. This perceived lack of preparedness was not due to lack of interest, but mainly due to insufficient training in SEL during their teacher education

programs. Quantitative data from questionnaires confirms the qualitative findings and reveals obvious variations across the five components of SEL instructional competence.

Pre-service EFL teachers expressed the highest confidence in their ability to design and organize activities such as role-playing, group discussions to foster students' SECs (SELIC 4). This confidence may result from their exposure to interactive, activity-based methods in the training program, which emphasize student engagement and collaboration. However, the effectiveness of these activities is undermined by the lack of explicit or direct connections to SEL. Lawlor (2016) argues that when SEL practices are implemented without anchoring them to a coherent framework, they risk being inconsistent and fragmented, reducing their transformative potential.

Similarly, pre-service EFL teachers reported high confidence in applying psychological and pedagogical principles (SELIC 1). This confidence may result from the appropriate integration of psychological and pedagogical content in the teacher education program. However, although pre-service teachers may excel in theoretical knowledge, their ability to adapt and apply these theories in real classroom settings remains limited. The findings also reveal significant variations in pre-service EFL teachers' confidence to model SECs for their students (SELIC 4). Teachers' ability to model these competencies is important as students are more likely to master SECs when they see them demonstrated (Bandura, 1977; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Stephanie et al., 2013). However, both qualitative and quantitative data show that pre-service EFL teachers lack confidence in modelling SECs for their students during their teaching practices. This lack of preparedness stems not only from underdeveloped SECs in some cases but also from the disconnect between personal SECs and the ability to apply SECs in teaching practices. This issue implies the need for training programs to focus on not only personal SECs but also on the skills to apply these competencies in real teaching contexts (Huynh et al., 2022).

In contrast, pre-service EFL teachers reported and demonstrated significantly lower confidence in using SEL concepts, principles and practices in teaching (SELIC 2). This gap highlights the lack of explicit instruction on SEL frameworks or the implicit nature of SEL integration within the training program. Although SEL-related concepts are present within the curriculum, they are often introduced informally or indirectly. This lack of explicit focus creates inconsistencies in how pre-service EFL teachers understand and apply SEL principles and concepts. As Greenberg et al. (2003) argue, implicit integration can lead to fragmented practices, as each pre-service teacher would interpret and implement SEL differently (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Tran & Le, 2023; Waajid et al., 2013).

However, the most concerning gap lies in pre-service EFL teachers' lack of preparedness in assessing students' SECs (SELIC 5). Assessment is a cornerstone of effective SEL implementation, as it enables teachers to monitor progress, identify areas for intervention

and provide targeted support (Durlak et al., 2011; Huynh et al., 2022; Zinsser et al., 2014). However, many pre-service teachers reported feeling unprepared to evaluate students' SECs. This lack of preparedness may result from the absence of explicit training on SEL-specific assessment tools and methods. The inability to assess SECs not only hinders effective implementation but also weakens the feedback channels necessary for refining teaching practices to support student growth. This gap reflects systemic issue in Vietnamese education, where traditional assessment tends to prioritize academic achievements and place little focus on non-cognitive skills such as SECs (Dinh et al., 2021; Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Taylor, 2002).

In summary, although pre-service EFL teachers reported promising levels of preparedness in applying foundational pedagogical principles, designing SEL activities and modelling SECs, their underpreparedness in using explicit SEL concepts and assessing students' SECs highlights significant gaps in teacher education programs. These gaps indicate a need for the program to move beyond implicit instruction and adopt explicit, structured approaches that can provide pre-service teachers with the formal theoretical knowledge, practical experience and assessment tools necessary to implement SEL effectively (Abrahams et al., 2019; Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Denham et al., 2009; Markowitz et al., 2016; Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012).

7.2.2.4. Pre-service EFL teachers' perceived barriers to SEL

Pre-service EFL teachers reported significant challenges to implementing SEL in the EFL classroom. Major obstacles include limited student engagement, time constraints, insufficient teacher proficiency in SECs, the absence of formal SEL training, resistance to student-centered methods and resource inadequacies. Some of these barriers are global in nature, and some are specific to the Vietnamese educational context.

One of the most notable challenges is low student engagement in SEL activities. This obstacle is understandable in the context of Vietnamese education. The country's exam-oriented educational environment naturally makes students prioritize academic achievement over other skills like SECs (Hoang & Vu, 2016; Tran & Le, 2023). Pre-service EFL teachers reported that fostering engagement in SEL-focused tasks is challenging in classrooms where students expect teacher-led instruction. However, the issue of student disengagement may stem from the fact that pre-service teachers can not design SEL-integrated learning activities that are truly engaging for students. Actually, some of them are still unsure how to integrate SEL effectively into their lessons. To overcome this challenge, teacher education programs need to provide more hands-on, practical training with clear examples of how SEL can be seamlessly embedded in language learning activities so that pre-service teachers can create engaging learning environments that simultaneously develop linguistic and social emotional skills.

Time constraints and curriculum overload further exacerbate the difficulty of implementing SEL, especially in Vietnam's educational contexts, which prioritize exam preparation and academic outcomes (Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Taylor, 2002). As many EFL courses are already packed with linguistic content, there is little room for explicit SEL instruction. This reflects findings from Huynh et al. (2021), Humphrey (2013) and Mahoney et al. (2018), who identify limited instructional time as a pervasive challenge to SEL integration across various educational contexts. However, it is also important to note that integrating SEL into teaching does not necessarily require separate or additional time (Martinez, 2016). SEL can be effectively embedded within existing lessons and activities such as brainstorming, group discussion, debates, reading comprehension tasks, argumentative writing, presentation, role plays and peer cheek to address academic and social emotional objectives simultaneously. In this way, SEL does not compete with academic learning but rather complements, accelerates it and becomes a natural part of the learning process rather than an added burden (Pentón Herrera, 2020).

Another important issue is the insufficient development of SECs among pre-service teachers themselves. Vietnamese teacher education programs have historically emphasized subject knowledge and pedagogy, so they often neglect the cultivation of teachers' own SECs (Taylor, 2002; Tran & Le, 2023). This lack of emphasis may leave many pre-service teachers feeling unprepared to model and teach SECs effectively. This is also the concern raised by Thornton (2023), who emphasizes the importance of SEL training for pre-service teachers. Without targeted training in SECs, pre-service teachers may have difficulty in creating emotionally safe and inclusive classrooms necessary for their students to develop SECs. Addressing this challenge requires integrating SECs development into teacher training programs (Jennings et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Lawlor, 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Stephanie et al., 2013; Tran & Le, 2023).

The lack of formal and explicit SEL training in teacher education programs emerge as another barrier. Although SEL concepts and principles may have been addressed informally, the absence of structured, intentional and explicit planning, instruction and reflection leaves pre-service teachers with a fragmented theoretical foundation. This finding aligns with global critiques such as those by Schonert-Reichl (2017) and Bridgeland et al., 2013. who emphasizes the necessity of explicit, practice-based SEL training. Providing pre-service teachers with explicit theories and experiential learning opportunities, such as micro-teaching sessions or supervised internships, could address the issues of limited theoretical knowledge and ineffective practical application (Huynh et al., 2021). This comprehensive and explicit training would provide pre-service teachers with strong formal knowledge and practical skills to implement SEL strategies in authentic classroom settings (Frey et al., 2019; Jennings et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2017; Tran & Le, 2023).

Resistance to SEL among educators (both teacher trainers and pre-service teachers) who have been accustomed to traditional methods is another challenge. SEL requires a transition toward student-centered, interactive teaching methods, which some teachers perceive as burdensome or misaligned with their traditional educational philosophy and practices. As Tran and Le (2023) claimed, the limited English proficiency and outdated pedagogical skills among EFL teachers are the foremost barriers to SEL integration in Vietnam. Despite the 2018 General Education Curriculum's emphasis on competency-based and learner-centered teaching, some English teachers continue to rely on outdated pedagogical practices such as exam-focused, teacher-centered approaches, leaving little room for emotional engagement or social interaction.

This resistance also align with global findings, where teachers often feel overwhelmed by the multiple demands of academic and social-emotional responsibilities (Domitrovich et al., 2019; Mahoney et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In Vietnam, education traditionally places greater emphasis on authority, discipline, academic achievement and rote learning, leaving little room for student voice, emotional expression or collaborative learning - core elements of SEL; therefore, it is easy to understand why there is resistance to SEL among educators (Kataoka et al., 2020; Saito et al. 2008; Hu, 2002; Tanaka, 2020). To overcome this barrier, pre-service training and professional development programs must emphasize SEL's alignment with existing pedagogical goals and demonstrate how it enhances both academic and social emotional outcomes to encourage a gradual change in teaching beliefs and practices (Markowitz et al., 2016).

Resource inadequacies also hinder SEL implementation. Pre-service EFL teachers frequently cited the lack of SEL-specific teaching materials or sample lesson plans as a significant barrier. Therefore, developing accessible resources that integrate SEL with language teaching objectives could provide pre-service EFL teachers with the practical tools and vivid examples they need to implement SEL effectively (Tran & Le, 2023). For example, instructional guides that outline SEL-focused activities adapted to EFL contexts would help bridge the gap between theory and practice, which will enable teachers to design lessons that address both academic goals and SECs.

Institutional challenges further complicate SEL integration. Although the Ministry of Education and Training's competency-based reforms advocate for holistic education (MOET, 2018), the lack of coordinated support for SEL limits its potential impacts. This reflects international research by Meyers et al. (2019) and Pentón Herrera (2020), who emphasize the importance of systemic alignment in sustaining SEL implementation. In Vietnam, where educational policies are often introduced in a top-down manner (Nguyen et al., 2006), the lack of clear guidelines and institutional support makes it difficult for schools and teachers to prioritize and implement SEL, especially when they are still competing with academic pressures.

In summary, the barriers to SEL implementation in Vietnamese EFL classrooms that pre-service teachers reported are closely interconnected. They reflect a combination of global obstacles and context-specific constraints. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes explicit SEL training, professional development, resource provision and systemic alignment. However, it is even more important to change the perceptions of educators. I would like to argue that the implementation of SEL does not necessarily require additional time, financial resources or external support. The teacher themselves is the most powerful resource who can integrate SEL flexibly into all aspects of the teaching and learning process. Their practices must come from their own needs, awareness and personal desire for growth.

7.2.3.5. Pre-service EFL teachers' strong need for explicit training in SEL

Although pre-service EFL teachers at VPU recognized the importance of SEL in fostering holistic student development, they felt inadequately prepared to integrate SEL into their teaching practices. It is the reason why they consistently expressed a strong need for more targeted training in SEL.

First and foremost, they expressed a need for more opportunities to develop their own SECs such as empathy, emotional regulation and responsible decision-making. They repeatedly emphasized that in order to effectively teach SECs for students, teachers themselves must master these skills. They viewed the mastery of SECs not as a personal advantage, but as a professional responsibility. As several pre-service teachers noted, students learn these competencies not through instruction alone but naturally by observing how teachers model them authentically and consistently during their teaching practices. This view aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that learners acquire behaviors and attitudes through observation and modeling.

However, the current training program often presents SEL-related skills in vague and fragmented ways, making it difficult for pre-service teachers to notice and develop these competencies. Without explicit instruction, clear terminology or a structured framework, many pre-service teachers reported that they could not clearly identify when or how SEL was being addressed. As a result, opportunities for developing their own SECs are frequently missed or overlooked. This concern is consistent with other research indicating that the integration of SEL in teacher education is often implicit, fragmented and insufficient (Burgin et al., 2021; Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Jennings et al., 2017; Markowitz et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). These perspectives reinforce the need for teacher education programs to prioritize the development of personal SECs in pre-service teachers, enabling them to serve as effective role models for their students.

In addition to SECs, pre-service EFL teachers reported their difficulty with SEL instructional competence. Although they intuitively recognized the value of SEL, they expressed concern about the lack of targeted training in SEL instructional competence

to help them implement SEL effectively in their EFL classroom. Therefore, they expressed a clear and urgent need for more structured and explicit training in SEL. They called for dedicated SEL courses, clearer integration of SEL into existing subjects, mandatory SEL inclusion, early exposure to SEL and access to SEL resources. These suggestions reflect a shared interest, openness and commitment among pre-service teachers toward SEL training to develop both SECs and SEL instructional competence essential for effective teaching. This attitude implies that the issue is not a lack of motivation but a lack of opportunity and guidance. It opens an important opportunity for curriculum innovations in EFL teacher education. Addressing these needs would equip pre-service teachers to implement SEL confidently and effectively, align their practices with global educational trends and support Vietnam's educational reforms toward a more holistic, competency-based education system (MOET, 2018; Tran & Le, 2023).

7.2.4. Practices in SEL: moderate-to-high and uneven proficiency

This section discusses pre-service EFL teachers' practices in SEL with a particular focus on their moderate-to-high but uneven proficiency across competencies and individuals. Pre-service EFL teachers exhibit notable strengths in certain SECs; however, significant disparities emerge in their practice of SEL instructional competence components. These variations indicate systemic gaps in teacher preparation programs and reveal important areas for targeted intervention so that pre-service EFL teachers can achieve consistent and effective SEL practices.

7.2.3.1. High but uneven proficiency in SECs among pre-service EFL teachers

The findings show that pre-service EFL teachers at VPU demonstrate notable strengths in certain SECs such as self-awareness, social awareness and responsible decision-making, but faced challenges in self-management and relationship skills. These challenges indicate important gaps that need to be filled for their holistic development and teaching effectiveness. Previous research also shows that SECs are rated as above average but uneven across domains (Huynh et al., 2018; Tran & Trinh, 2017).

Social awareness emerged as a standout strength among pre-service EFL teachers. This finding is not unexpected as it is closely associated with Vietnam's cultural values of empathy, harmony and community (Nguyen et al., 2006). These values are also reflected in the Vietnamese educational values, where qualities such as respect, inclusivity and social cohesion are considered essential for both teachers and students (Nguyen et al., 2006). As future EFL teachers, this competence is extremely important as it allows pre-service teachers to understand students' emotional states, socio-cultural backgrounds and learning preferences. These skills are valuable for them to create inclusive learning environments where students feel valued and supported, especially in EFL contexts that often involve cultural and linguistic diversity (Adams & Richie, 2017).

The findings also reveal that responsible decision-making is a strength among pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam. Like social awareness, this competence is closely associated with Vietnam's long-standing emphasis on moral and ethical education (Pham & Renshaw, 2013). Conventionally, Vietnamese education has emphasized fostering accountability, respect and ethical responsibility for students, and teachers are often expected to serve as role models for these qualities (Taylor, 2002). However, responsible decision-making in modern education requires more than ethics; it requires critical thinking, adaptability and the ability to anticipate the consequences of one's actions (CASEL, 2020). The findings highlight the pre-service teachers' strengths in information analysis and creative problem-solving; however, they show lower proficiency in critical thinking and consequence evaluation.

Regarding self-awareness, the findings reveal that pre-service teachers demonstrate high proficiency. They excel in certain areas such as identifying emotions, recognizing personal strengths and limitations and expressing interests. However, maintaining self-confidence, especially in public speaking, remains a challenge. Observations of hesitations during presentations and lower scores in related areas highlight this difficulty. This is problematic, as self-awareness is considered foundational for all other SECs. Therefore, it is necessary to further enhance pre-service teachers' self-awareness through targeted activities such as public speaking workshops and emotional regulation exercises. These activities would help them build both confidence and emotional resilience, and better prepare them for the demands of modern teaching environments.

Relationship skills, including effective communication, conflict resolution and collaboration, were reported as another area of concern for pre-service EFL teachers. These skills are important for creating inclusive and cooperative classroom environments (Zinsser et al., 2014); however, the findings indicate they remain at moderate-to-high, but not very high level. The traditional teacher-centered approach prevalent in Vietnamese classrooms often prioritizes authority and discipline over collaboration and dialogue, limiting opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice conflict resolution and collaborative strategies (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Hu, 2002; Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Taylor, 2002). In addition, in Vietnamese culture, people tend to avoid conflicts, as one popular Vietnamese proverb goes, *"một điều nhịn là chín điều lành"* (one concession brings about nine blessings). This mindset reflects a cultural emphasis on maintaining group harmony and avoiding direct confrontation or individual assertiveness. In this context, conflicts are typically viewed as threats to social unity rather than as opportunities for learning and emotional well-being. As a result, pre-service teachers may feel reluctant or even discouraged to address conflicts directly.

Despite their strengths in other SECs, self-management emerged as the biggest challenge for pre-service EFL teachers. This competency, which encompasses emotional

regulation, autonomy, goal-setting, perseverance, stress management and time prioritization, is important for managing the complex demands of teaching and learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The relatively low proficiency in self-management is concerning, especially in the context of Vietnam, where teachers often face high workloads and rigid curriculum demands. The lack of self-management may lead to burnout, emotional exhaustion and reduced classroom effectiveness, especially among novice teachers (Tran & Le, 2023). This finding is somewhat unexpected because self-management, especially discipline and perseverance, is strongly emphasized in Vietnamese culture. It is also emphasized the most in Vietnam's 2018 national general education curriculum and VPU's EFL teacher training curriculum. This finding suggests a gap between curriculum expectations and actual classroom practice. Bridging these gaps requires a more practice-oriented approach within teacher training programs.

Finally, the findings reveal variations in SECs across pre-service EFL teachers, and this raises concerns about their preparedness to manage the social emotional dimensions of their teaching. Some pre-service teachers demonstrate strong competencies in areas such as social awareness and responsible decision-making, but others show lower proficiency, especially in self-management and self-awareness. These gaps may arise from differences in personal experiences or inconsistencies in training quality. These disparities could hinder less proficient pre-service teachers from effectively modeling and applying SECs in their classrooms. To address these variations, it is necessary for the training program to provide targeted interventions such as experiential learning activities, role-play and reflective practices to ensure that all pre-service EFL teachers develop all the five core SECs and the related skills.

In summary, the findings reveal both strengths and gaps in pre-service EFL teachers' practices in SECs. They demonstrate notable strengths in social awareness, self-awareness and responsible decision-making; however, they often have difficulty with self-management and relationship skills. It means that practices in SEL are uneven across the five core SECs and across the pre-service teachers themselves. This imbalance may hinder their social and emotional growth as well as limit their ability to teach and model SECs in their classrooms. Therefore the EFL teacher training program needs to ensure that all pre-service EFL teachers develop balanced SECs.

7.2.3.2. *Moderate and uneven proficiency in SEL instructional competence*

The findings reveal moderate and uneven proficiency across the five components of SEL instructional competence (SELIC) among pre-service EFL teachers. Although they demonstrated notable strengths in applying foundational psychological and pedagogical principles and designing SEL-focused activities, considerable gaps were identified in addressing social emotional issues explicitly, modeling and assessing students' SECs.

Pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated obvious strengths in applying psychological and pedagogical principles (SELIC1). They can use effective methodologies such as Communicative language teaching and Task-based language teaching. These methods inherently foster collaboration, communication and problem-solving; therefore, they can support both language acquisition and SECs (Huynh et al., 2022; Rimm-Kaufman & Hamre, 2010; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). For instance, collaborative tasks naturally aligns with SEL principles by promoting collaboration and adaptability (Yoder, 2014). These findings demonstrate the importance of foundational psychological and pedagogical strategies to address both academic and social emotional goals. Therefore, to promote SEL in the EFL classroom, teacher training programs should first equip pre-service teachers with strong psychological and pedagogical foundations.

However, the findings also reveal inconsistencies among pre-service teachers in adapting these methods to diverse classroom situations. While some pre-service teachers can implement these methods effectively, many others need further training to cater to the varied needs of students in terms of language proficiency as well as social and emotional needs. This challenge reflects global trends highlighted by Farrell (2016), where pre-service teachers often excel in theoretical knowledge but face difficulties in applying it flexibly in real-world classroom settings. These inconsistencies may result from limited exposure to diverse teaching contexts during training or insufficient opportunities for reflective practice (Boulton, 2014). Addressing this gap requires teacher education programs to prioritize experiential learning such as classroom simulations, peer feedback and practical internships to ensure that pre-service teachers can adapt effective teaching methods to meet the academic and psychological needs of their learners. This is particularly important in the context of Vietnamese EFL classrooms, where large class sizes and resource constraints often exacerbate challenges in differentiation and flexibility (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Hoang & Vu, 2016; Tran & Le, 2023).

When it comes to SELIC 2, pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated notable gaps in their ability to address social and emotional issues in their classroom. Observational data reveals missed opportunities to support students' social and emotional needs such as anxiety and shame during presentations or disengagement during group activities. They also lacked the necessary vocabulary to address the issues explicitly. The low variations in scores suggests that this deficiency is consistent across the pre-service EFL teachers at VPU. This issue reflects exaggerated academic priorities in Vietnam's educational system, which often marginalizes social and emotional factors in favor of cognitive achievement (Hoang & Vu, 2016; Kataoka et al., 2020; Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Tran & Le, 2023). Tanaka (2020) once described classrooms in Vietnam as heavily reliant on textbooks and knowledge transmission. Students typically remain silent for extended periods, adhering strictly to teachers' instructions and aiming to satisfy teachers by delivering expected answers. Even when active learning strategies were introduced, they

appeared superficial. Teachers prioritized covering the textbook content rather than caring for students' social and emotional needs. Global research also documents this challenge, reporting that many teachers feel unprepared or reluctant to address students' social and emotional issues due to limited exposure to practical strategies during training (Marlow & Inman, 2001; Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012; Thornton, 2023).

Regarding SELIC 3, pre-service teachers demonstrated moderate proficiency in modeling SECs for their students during their teaching practices. Modeling is a powerful pedagogical practice that allows teachers to demonstrate SECs so that their students can observe and acquire them (Bandura, 1977; Braun et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Yoder & Gurke, 2017). However, the variations in scores and observational data suggest that although some could model SECs for their students, others failed. These variations may result from individual differences in SECs, as research indicates that teachers who lack SECs may find it hard to model them in practice (Braun et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Stephanie et al., 2013). However, it is interesting to note that although some pre-service teachers possess good SECs, they still failed or neglected to model them in classroom. This gap raises questions about the transferability of personal SECs into instructional practice. The absence of explicit training on how to model SECs in teaching contexts may lead to this gap. This issue highlights the need for teacher education programs to focus not only on developing SECs but also on training pre-service teachers how to model SECs in teaching practices.

Regarding SELIC 4, pre-service teachers demonstrated quite high proficiency in designing and organizing activities to foster SECs for their students. Classroom observations and focus group interview reveal that they employed diverse strategies, including student check-ins, pairwork, group work, discussions, intercultural communication, interactive games, reflective tasks, role-playing simulations and project-based learning, to support the development of SECs in their students. These activities not only enhanced students' language proficiency but also provided platforms for students to practice empathy, emotional regulation and collaboration (Pentón Herrera, 2020; Yoder & Gurke, 2017). However, challenges such as inconsistent facilitation, lack of scaffolding and insufficient follow-up reflections limited the impact of these activities on SECs development. For instance, although pre-service teachers could organize group work and collaborative projects for their students, these activities often lacked explicit connections to the five core SECs. In other words, although SEL elements might emerge naturally during classroom activities, they were rarely intentionally planned, taught, evaluated or reflected, making them by-products of language instruction rather than a core instructional objective.

This situation indicates a disconnect between creative lesson design and the intentional integration of SEL skills, a common issue in global SEL implementation efforts

(Humphrey, 2013). Without explicit links, these practices often remain fragmented and inconsistent, reducing their potential to foster SECs in students (Durlak et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2017). To address these gaps, pre-service teachers require targeted training to help them align their teaching methods with SEL objectives, and ensure that the activities they organize can serve both academic and social-emotional purposes. Such training should emphasize the integration of role-playing, creative exercises and reflective tasks that explicitly target SECs. Structured follow-up reflections are also essential to deepen students' understanding of SEL concepts and reinforce their practical application.

The most notable gap was in assessing students' SECs (SELIC 5). All the data sources consistently reveal that pre-service teachers prioritized academic objectives, but neglected or failed to evaluate their students' SECs. This gap is concerning because assessment helps evaluate students' progress and guides instructional decisions (Abrahams et al., 2019; Humphrey, 2013). The lack of proficiency in this area may result from insufficient exposure to assessment tools and methods such as rubrics, reflective journals and peer evaluations during their training. This gap aligns with global research by Schonert-Reichl (2017), which highlights the widespread neglect of SEL assessment in teacher training. It also reflects the systemic shortcomings in Vietnamese education, where academic achievements are prioritized over non-cognitive skills (Dinh et al., 2021; Tran & Le, 2023). To fill this gap, the training program needs to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary tools and strategies to observe, assess, give feedback and adapt their teaching based on students' social and emotional needs.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers' practices in SEL were moderate, mostly implicit, intuitive, fragmented, inconsistent and unintentional. The reasons for these inconsistencies can be traced back to the implicit nature of SEL training in the teacher education program. This finding aligns with the gaps identified by Huynh et al. (2022). To address these gaps, teacher education programs need to adopt a more structured, explicit and balanced approach that integrates formal SEL theory as well as practical teaching and assessment methods.

7.2.3.3. Significant variations across groups of pre-service EFL teachers

The findings reveal significant variations in the practice of SECs among pre-service EFL teachers. In other words, notable disparities in SECs were observed across different groups of pre-service teachers. High academic achievers generally demonstrated stronger SECs. It means that pre-service teachers who excel academically are more likely to exhibit higher levels of resilience, emotional regulation and interpersonal harmony. All of these skills enable them to overcome challenges in both educational and social contexts. This finding supports Durlak et al.'s (2011) assertion that cognitive and non-

cognitive skills are interdependent. It also reinforces the importance of integrating SEL in teacher education programs, as academic success and SEL competencies mutually reinforce one another (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Markowitz et al., 2016).

The findings also highlight significant progress in specific SECs such as self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making as pre-service teachers advance through their training programs. These improvements align with previous studies in that experiential learning and collaborative activities can develop SECs. Both Durlak et al. (2011) and Lawlor's (2016) emphasize that structured interventions such as role-play and reflective practices, are effective in enhancing SECs. This suggests that the EFL teacher training curriculum of VPU integrates these strategies successfully, offering pre-service teachers opportunities to take part in collaborative projects, scenario-based learning and peer feedback sessions to develop these SECs. However, the relative stability of self-awareness and social awareness throughout the training program is notable. This finding may suggest that self-awareness and social awareness may not be intentionally addressed in the teacher training curriculum. This gap suggests a need for more explicit training strategies to foster all the five core SECs.

Regarding SEL instructional competence, the findings reveal significant disparities among pre-service teachers. These disparities may be driven by differences in SEL training, mentorship and attitudes toward SEL. Some pre-service teachers effectively integrated SEL principles into their teaching and fostered positive relationships, emotional regulation and collaboration, which aligns with global SEL frameworks (CASEL, 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In contrast, some pre-service teachers adhered to traditional, academic-centered approaches, prioritized rote learning and exam preparation, which limited opportunities to foster students' SECs (Kataoka et al. 2020; Nguyen & Habók, 2020; Saito et al. 2008). It is notable that training years, statistically, do not influence SEL instructional competence. This finding is concerning, as it highlights a critical gap in the teacher education curriculum, where the development of SEL instructional competence is not systematically embedded across the training years.

It is also interesting to note that the study found no significant gender differences in SECs among pre-service EFL teachers. This finding aligns with Huynh et al.'s (2022) research on Vietnamese primary school teachers' SEL, which also reported no notable gender-based disparities. However, gender does influence SEL instructional competence. It suggests that male and female pre-service teachers may differ in how they apply SEL principles in their teaching practices. This difference could be attributed to a range of sociocultural, psychological and educational factors that need further research, but it highlights the need for teacher education programs to ensure that SEL training is inclusive and equitable for all pre-service teachers, regardless of gender.

7.2.3.4. Correlations among practices in SECs and SEL instructional competence

The findings of this study highlight significant interconnections among the five core SECs and their relationship with SEL instructional competence. Firstly, both qualitative and quantitative analysis results confirm that all the five core SECs are strongly interrelated. This interdependence suggests that improvements in one competency can foster growth in others. For instance, stronger self-awareness allows teachers to identify and regulate their emotions more effectively, which directly supports self-management. Similarly, enhanced self-management skills can lead to better relationship skills because teachers who can manage their stress and emotions are more likely to interact positively with students and colleagues. These findings align with established frameworks such as Burkitt (2014), CASEL (2020), Jennings and Greenberg (2009), Goleman (1995), and Durlak et al. (2011), which emphasizes the holistic and interdependent nature of SECs as well as their collective impact on personal and professional success.

However, qualitative data reveals a noteworthy divergence, especially between self-management and relationship skills. Although quantitative data suggest a positive correlation, the interviews reveal potential tensions. For instance, some pre-service teachers claimed that strong self-management may limit opportunities for building trust and relationships as they only focused on personal coping strategies at the expense of group engagement. This observation contrasts with previous studies, which consistently claim that SECs are mutually reinforcing (CASEL, 2020; Goleman, 1995). According to these studies, well-developed self-management typically supports relational capacities. This divergence may result from Vietnam's educational context, where individual responsibility is often prioritized over collaborative efforts (Nguyen & Habók, 2020). Addressing these tensions require a more deliberate integration of collaborative practices alongside the development of individual regulatory skills.

Although the strong interconnections among the five core SECs were evident, the their relationships with SEL instructional competence were weaker. This finding suggests that although strong SECs provide a necessary foundation, they are insufficient for ensuring effective SEL implementation. This finding partly aligns with Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) on the importance of teachers' SECs, but it diverges from their perspectives that see SECs as sufficient for effective SEL teaching. This divergence highlights the importance of separating SECs and SEL instructional competence. It also implies that teacher-education programs must train pre-service teachers in SEL instructional competence, and that they should not assume that strong SECs alone are sufficient for effective SEL implementation in teaching practices. While SECs help teachers regulate their own emotions and maintain relationships, SEL instructional competence enables them to design, implement, model and assess SEL activities.

The finding supports Huynh et al.'s (2022) and Phan's (2021) argument that SEL instructional competence involves not only personal SECs but also the ability to apply psychological and pedagogical principles, address social-emotional issues, design SEL-focused activities and assess students' SECs. Qualitative data also highlights this gap. Although pre-service teachers recognize the importance of fostering students' SECs and possess strong SECs, the absence of explicit training in SEL instructional competence limits their ability to implement SEL. These findings are supported by Jennings et al. (2017) and Schonert-Reichl (2017) who emphasizes that without explicit training, the application of SEL remains fragmented and inconsistent.

In summary, the findings reveal strong interconnections among SECs and their foundational role in SEL instructional competence; however, there are challenges in translating personal SECs into instructional practices. These findings emphasize the need for a more holistic approach to integrating SECs and SEL instructional competence in teacher education programs. It is also important to foster growth across all SECs, and to explicitly link personal SECs with SEL instructional competence.

7.2.5. Matches and mismatches between perceptions and practices of SEL

The findings reveal several meaningful matches between what pre-service EFL teachers perceive about SEL and how they practice it in actual classrooms. On the one hand, their positive perceptions, especially regarding the value and relevance of SEL, motivate them to implement SEL in their practice. On the other hand, the lack of formal knowledge and conceptual clarity lead to implicit, inconsistent and largely intuitive practices.

One of the most evident matches lies in the way *beliefs about SEL's benefits and the recognition of the teacher's multiple roles for SEL motivate practices in SEL*. Pre-service teachers consistently value SEL as beneficial for fostering student well-being, classroom harmony, engagement and overall academic success. They also clearly recognize their multiple roles for SEL promotion. This belief was reflected in their frequent practice of interactive learning strategies such as group work, cooperative projects, peer teaching and role-plays. These activities inherently create opportunities for students to practice not only language skills but also SEL skills such as teamwork, emotional regulation, respect, empathy, conflict resolution, critical thinking and communication (CASEL, 2020). Even though they might not label these as SEL practices, their understanding of SEL's value and their intention to create inclusive, supportive and communicative learning environments signals a perception-practice alignment necessary for effective SEL. Recent research supports this correlation and emphasizes that teachers who value SEL are more likely to initiate and sustain SEL implementation (Bracket et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Buchanan et al., 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Despite these encouraging efforts, the gap between perceptions and practices is still evident. Their scores for SECs (3.67) and SEL instructional competence (3.34) reveal

that practices in SEL were at lower levels compared to positive attitudes (3.99). In other words, although pre-service teachers perceive SEL very positively, their ability to effectively implement SEL in practice remains limited. This mismatch can be attributed to several significant factors. Firstly, the exam-oriented and knowledge-heavy education system in Vietnam as well as the lack of formal SEL frameworks, regulations, policies and support mechanisms force pre-service teachers to prioritize knowledge transmission and test preparation; as a result, there is little time to prioritize or experiment with SEL practices. Even when they value SEL, their SEL-related practices are constrained by time pressures, curriculum rigidity and assessment priorities. These findings align with Zinsser et al. (2014), who noted that institutional pressures often discourage teachers from SEL practices, despite personal beliefs in their importance.

Another major factor is the lack of explicit training in SEL within the EFL teacher education curriculum. SEL principles are often introduced implicitly within general psychological and pedagogical courses. Without clear guidelines, targeted training modules or embedded learning outcomes focused on SEL, pre-service teachers tend to rely on intuitive strategies rather than intentional implementation. (Markowitz et al., 2016; Boulton, 2014; Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012; Huck et al., 2023; Tran & Le, 2023). Even when employing SEL-aligned methods such as role-plays or collaborative projects, their lack of formal knowledge and practical skills limits their ability to plan, deliver instructions and assess SECs intentionally.

Actually, their reported limited formal knowledge of SEL leads to the fact that their classroom practices tend to be intuitive, fragmented and experiential rather than theory-driven. Although they implement group work, role-play or cooperative learning, which inherently support SEL, the lack of formal SEL knowledge, vocabulary, intentional planning, pedagogical tools and assessment strategies limits their potential impact (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Boulton, 2014). Due to gaps in curriculum design and the absence of explicit SEL training, pre-service teachers tend to rely on personal belief or prior experiences. To bridge this gap, teacher education programs must offer explicit and scaffolded SEL training. Doing so would empower pre-service teachers not only to value SEL but to understand and apply it in intentional, systematic ways. When positive perceptions are supported by a formal knowledge base and practical tools, they can become a powerful driver of effective classroom practice (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Markowitz et al., 2016; Huck et al., 2023).

The alignment between perceptions and practices of SEL is also strongly reflected in their perceived level of preparedness. Although many express a clear understanding of SEL's importance and attempt to apply SEL in their teaching, they also acknowledge their lack of preparedness. In the focus group, they consistently described feeling motivated but under-equipped to implement SEL in practices. For instance, several pre-

service teachers admitted that they often encourage cooperation and emotional support in class, but they are unsure how to teach or assess students' SECs. Classroom observations of actual practices match this perceived lack of preparedness. Although many intuitively employed SEL-related activities, such as encouraging peer collaboration, using positive reinforcement, or responding sensitively to student behavior, these practices were often spontaneous, inconsistent and lacked explicit objectives or assessment criteria. What is promising is that these pre-service teachers are aware of their limited preparedness, and actively express a strong desire for more structured training in SEL.

The alignment between pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL is also empirically confirmed through statistical analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient of $r=.44$ demonstrates a positive relationship between perceptions of SEL and actual practices. This statistical evidence reinforces the qualitative finding that positive perceptions of SEL, particularly beliefs in its benefits, the teacher's role, and training needs, are meaningfully associated with the extent to which SEL principles are enacted in classroom settings. This correlation suggests that pre-service teachers who hold stronger beliefs about the importance of SEL are more likely to exhibit SEL-aligned practices, even though those practices are informal or intuitive. For instance, those who view SEL as important for student success tend to implement collaborative activities, model emotional regulation and attempt to address students' interpersonal needs, despite lacking explicit training. Although the correlation is not so strong as to imply a perfect match, it clearly points to perception as a significant predictor of practice.

Finally, the match between perceptions and practices in this study suggests that SEL is not a foreign or additional task, but something already exists in the perceptions and practices of pre-service teachers. Even in the absence of structured SEL training, their classrooms already include the conditions for SECs, such as trust, collaboration and mutual respect. The task ahead are to transform these fragmented efforts into proactive, intentional, scaffolded and sustainable practices through policy support, explicit training, targeted instruction, reflective practice and structured assessment. With appropriate training and support, pre-service EFL teachers can fully translate their positive perceptions into intentional, sustainable and impactful SEL practices.

In summary, pre-service EFL teachers' positive attitudes to SEL, their recognition of SEL's benefits and their perceived role as SEL facilitators lay a promising foundation for its integration into their training and teaching practices. However, the implicit nature of SEL training, their limited formal knowledge of SEL and their perceived lack of preparedness prevent these positive beliefs from being fully translated into consistent, intentional and comprehensive practices. To bridge this gap, it is essential that SEL be embedded explicitly within teacher education curricula and supported by clear policy.

7.2.5. The influence of the program on pre-service teachers' SEL perceptions and practices

The study reveal that the EFL teacher education program influences pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL in an implicit and fragmented manner. SEL elements were present in the curriculum, but they are rarely labeled or measured. Teacher trainers integrated SEL informally, and acknowledged the absence of official, structured instruction on SEL. Pre-service teachers reflected that they had vague and fragmented exposure to SEL training. This approach has both enabling and constraining effects: it shaped pre-service teachers' positive perceptions and fostered some intuitive practices but left them with only fragmented awareness and limited practices. This section, therefore, discusses these influences, including the influences of policy gaps, institutional and teacher trainers' advocacy, the implicit nature of SEL training, and the imbalanced emphasis on different aspects of SEL, on pre-service teachers' preparation, perceptions and practices in SEL.

7.2.5.1. The influence of the absence of policies for SEL training in teacher education

Vietnam's education policies do acknowledge the need for developing students' SEL-related skills and emphasize teachers' roles in fostering students' holistic development (MOET, 2018; Tran & Le, 2023). This highlights the need for training pre-service teachers in SEL, including both SECs and SEL instructional competence (Lawlor, 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Huynh et al., 2023; Phan, 2021). Despite these policy aspirations, there is a noticeable lack of explicit guidelines, structured SEL frameworks, dedicated SEL training and assessment mechanisms in SEL training within teacher education programs. This lack of practical directives results in fragmented and inconsistent SEL training, with little institutional accountability for ensuring that pre-service teachers develop the necessary SECs and SEL instructional competence to foster SECs for their students.

The absence of explicit policies mandating SEL training in teacher education directly shapes pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices. The lack of clear frameworks, structured curricula and assessment mechanisms means SEL is introduced only incidentally and implicitly. As a result, pre-service teachers often perceive SEL as valuable but abstract, associating it with personal qualities or soft skills rather than as a professional competence with specific skills and strategies (Burgin et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This incomplete understanding limits their confidence and preparedness. In practice, they tend to rely on intuitive, incidental methods without intentionally targeting specific SECs like emotional regulation or conflict resolution (Jones et al., 2013; Markowitz et al., 2016). The lack of policy guidance thus reduces SEL to a hidden curriculum: unevenly experienced, inconsistently applied, and perceived as optional rather than integral. Stronger policy commitment is, therefore, essential to ensure pre-service teachers not only value SEL but are also equipped to implement it systematically (Hellman & Milling, 2020).

7.2.5.2. *The influence of EFL teacher trainers' advocacy for SEL*

Despite the lack of SEL policies, EFL teacher trainers still recognize the value of SEL and advocate for its integration in teacher education. They strongly believe in SEL's potential to enhance both teaching and learning as it can address the social and emotional issues that commonly arise in language classrooms. They view SEL as an essential component of modern education, and they believe that SEL aligns with the educational reform toward competency-based approach in Vietnam. In addition, they consistently emphasized the cultural alignment of SEL with Vietnam's values of community and social harmony. They also emphasized that any teachers need to act as both role models, who need to demonstrate social emotional skills like empathy and self-regulation for their students, and as companions who support students' academic, social and emotional development throughout their learning process.

To integrate SEL into teacher education, EFL teacher trainers employed a range of strategies, which align with both cultural traditions and global best practices. For example, SEL principles are embedded in group work and extracurricular activities such as volunteer work, cultural events and sports to provide pre-service teachers with authentic opportunities to build up and then apply SECs in real-world contexts (Burgin et al., 2021; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Expanding assessment criteria to include social emotional dimensions such as collaboration, peer interaction and emotional expression is another strategy employed by teacher trainers. This modification reflects a growing recognition of the need for holistic evaluation, aligning with SEL principles (Yoder, 2014). Furthermore, they modeled SECs through their interactions with pre-service teachers, and this modelling reinforces Vietnam's cultural expectation of teachers as moral exemplars and role models for students. This practice aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes observational learning as a central mechanism in skill acquisition.

Although these efforts contribute to SEL training for pre-service teachers, they remain implicit, insufficient and inconsistent, depending heavily on individual trainers' educational philosophy, experience and intuitive inclination rather than evidence-based pedagogy. This creates inequities in how SEL is perceived and practiced among pre-service teachers. Actually, the extent to which the pre-service teachers practice SEL depends a lot on whether the trainers create learning environment, set expectations, model behaviors, and provide ongoing guidance and feedback related to SEL. When trainers explicitly encourage SECs like collaboration and conflict resolution, model these skills, and set clear expectations or requirements, pre-service teachers are more likely to exhibit these skills. In contrast, when trainers fail to articulate clear goals, offer encouragement or assess progress, pre-service teachers tend to engage less in SEL practices. This finding also aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which

highlights the importance of observational learning in shaping behaviors. Trainers who prioritize SEL not only model effective practices but also inspire confidence and motivation among pre-service teachers to practise SEL (Braun et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Pentón Herrera, 2020; Stephanie et al., 2013).

By embedding SEL into group work or extracurricular activities, and by modeling empathy, self-regulation, and care in their daily interactions, trainers make SEL appear both relevant and culturally aligned with Vietnamese values of harmony and community (Bandura, 1977; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Tran & Le, 2023). This advocacy fosters positive perceptions, with pre-service teachers viewing SEL as integral to good teaching and classroom harmony, and it encourages intuitive practices such as promoting cooperation and managing emotions. However, because integration depends heavily on individual trainers' philosophies, goodwill, expertise and implicit messages, training remains inconsistent. As a result, pre-service teachers often practise SEL reactively and implicitly, lacking the structured strategies and confidence needed for systematic application (Burgin et al., 2021; Braun et al., 2020; Pentón Herrera, 2020). Trainers' efforts thus inspire openness and initial practice, but without explicit instruction, SEL continues to be treated as marginal.

Teacher trainers themselves recognize this gap and call for more well-structured professional development and clear guidelines to be able to model and mentor SEL consistently in teacher education. This openness and willingness suggests a commitment to adopt structured SEL frameworks to move from intuitive to formal SEL training. If all teacher trainers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools to model and mentor SEL effectively, they can ensure more consistent and impactful SEL training, perceptions and practices among pre-service EFL teachers.

7.2.5.3. The influence of the implicit and insufficient nature of SEL training

Due to the lack of explicit policies and standardized training programs as discussed above, SEL is integrated into the EFL teacher training program in an implicit and inconsistent manner. Elements of SEL are found in the curriculum, but they are addressed indirectly in coursework, micro-teaching and pracctcum guidelines rather than as a stand-alone course or module. However, the study also reveals the limitations of this implicit approach. It lacks clear objectives, intentional and structured planning, explicit instruction, deep reflection and clear assessment criteria.

This implicit approach can also be observed in teacher trainers' instructional practices. Despite their efforts to incorporate SEL-related elements into teacher education, they admitted that they lack formal knowledge of SEL. Without a comprehensive formal understanding of SEL principles and strategies, the teacher trainers often rely on intuitive

practices which are guided by personal experiences, cultural traditions and foundational pedagogical knowledge. Although these efforts may demonstrate aspects of SEL, they lack explicitness, clear emphasis and consistency across trainers.

This implicit approach may influence pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL. Quantitative results show a moderate positive correlation ($r=.478$) between training and perceptions and a stronger correlation ($r=.564$) between training and practices. These findings suggest that exposure to SEL-related content, whether explicitly or implicitly, does influence how pre-service teachers perceive and practise SEL. However, the implicit approaches to SEL training means that such perceptions and practices were not recognized, scaffolded or reinforced. As a result, pre-service teachers often view SEL as desirable but an abstract ideal rather than a practical, actionable framework (Huynh et al., 2022; Tran & Le, 2023).

The influence of implicit training was also reflected in pre-service teachers' practices. Although many demonstrated aspects of the five core SECs and the five components of SEL instructional competence, their practices were often reactive, intuitive, inconsistent, implicit, variably applied and less impactful. For instance, pre-service teachers often implement methods like task-based learning to get students involved in collaborative problem-solving tasks, which can naturally foster skills such as empathy, communication and cooperation. However, these SEL-related skills are often treated as secondary and incidental by-products rather than as intentional learning goals.

Although intuitive practices can still produce positive outcomes, they lack depth, consistency, comprehensiveness and sustainability (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017; Frey et al., 2019). Pre-service teachers tend to focus on completing the immediate task rather than intentionally using these activities to develop students' SECs. This intuitive practice, shaped by implicit training, may limit the opportunities for fostering students' SECs in a strong and comprehensive way (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2022). In other cases, although some teacher trainers modeled SECs or SEL instructional competence, these efforts are not consistent and explicit enough for pre-service teachers to understand, identify, master and apply these skills. This is the reason why the pre-service teachers consistently reported a lack of SEL training and an incomplete understanding of how to apply SEL in their classrooms. This gap was also acknowledged by teacher trainers themselves; therefore, they expressed a strong need for formal SEL training so that they can deliver SEL-rich instruction.

In summary, implicit training creates awareness, positive attitudes and intuitive practice, but not professional expertise and competence to implement SEL effectively in classroom. Addressing this gap requires a more systematic, explicit and comprehensive approach to SEL training to change pre-service teachers' perceptions from intuitive appreciation to confident, intentional and evidence-based practice.

7.2.5.4. *The influence of the imbalanced emphasis on SECs in teacher education*

The analysis of the Vietnamese national general education curriculum and the EFL teacher training program of VPU indicates a clear but uneven emphasis on SECs. The curricula place strong emphasis on self-management; moderate emphasis on social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making; and minimal focus on self-awareness. This imbalance indicates a divergence from internationally recognized frameworks such as CASEL's (2020) Framework for Systematic SEL, which advocates for a balanced development of all five SECs to ensure holistic development.

This uneven emphasis may result from a combination of cultural values and educational priorities within the Vietnamese education system. For example, the greatest emphasis on self-management reflects the deep-rooted cultural values influenced by Confucian thoughts, which prioritize discipline, self-regulation and perseverance (Nguyen et al., 2006). It also reflects the traditional educational methods, which prioritize rote learning, exam preparation, teacher-centered instruction, academic achievement and student compliance over student autonomy (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Kataoka et al., 2020; Saito et al. 2008). However, this overemphasis raises concerns about the imbalance between behavioral compliance and emotional well-being (CASEL, 2020).

The minimal attention to self-awareness is also notable as this competence is given a foundational role in most SEL frameworks. Limited focus on self-awareness may result from collectivist values of Vietnamese society, where modesty and social harmony are more valued than individual assertiveness and well-being (Jamieson, 2023). However, self-awareness is essential for individuals to understand their emotions, strengths and limitations, and it serves as an important precursor to competencies such as empathy, social awareness and responsible decision-making (Denham et al., 2014). The pre-service teachers themselves recognized the foundational role of self-awareness for developing other SECs. Without sufficient emphasis on self-awareness, the curriculum may miss the opportunities to foster emotional well-being for pre-service teachers.

The curriculum's moderate emphasis on social awareness and relationship-building skills also indicates challenges. Language learning is inherently social, requiring meaningful interactions and mutual understanding to achieve both linguistic and social competencies (Dewaele et al., 2022; Pentón Herrera 2020). Without sufficient training in these social competencies, pre-service EFL teachers may find it hard to create a supportive and communicative classroom environment essential for effective language learning (Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012). For example, insufficient training in social awareness may leave pre-service EFL teachers underprepared to identify and address student anxieties, handle diverse classroom interactions or promote cross-cultural understanding (Pentón Herrera, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2019).

The uneven emphasis on SECs in Vietnamese EFL teacher education shapes pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices in a fragmented manner. As self-management was prioritized, they often relate SEL to discipline and perseverance. Although this fosters persistence and order, it limits their perception of SEL as a holistic framework. The minimal attention to self-awareness is especially problematic, since it supports empathy, social awareness and decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Denham et al., 2014). Similarly, only moderate emphasis on social awareness and relationship skills leaves them underprepared to manage diverse interactions or create supportive, communicative classrooms. Consequently, their practices often remain compliance-oriented and fragmented rather than balanced and intentional. To fill this gap, it is necessary to adopt a more balanced and comprehensive approach to SECs training in teacher education to ensure pre-service teachers can model and foster SECs for their students.

7.2.5.5. Influence of the uneven emphasis on SEL instructional competence components

In addition to gaps in training SECs, the analysis of the EFL teacher training program reveals an implicit nature and uneven emphasis on the five components of SEL instructional competence. Firstly, the curriculum strongly emphasizes training pre-service teachers in psychological and pedagogical foundations. This focus aligns with research by Brown et al. (2010) and Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015), which emphasizes the importance of psychological and pedagogical understanding as a foundation for creating environments that foster social, emotional and academic development.

However, although the curriculum encourages pre-service EFL teachers to model SECs and organize activities to foster SECs for their students, these components are largely implicit rather than explicitly presented. This lack of explicit guidance may limit the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping teachers to model and teach SECs effectively (Jennings and Greenberg; 2009; Lawlor, 2016), and this can potentially diminish the impact of SEL on their students (Bridgeland et al., 2013). This implicit approach reflects broader trends in Vietnamese education, where SEL components are integrated informally and lack the systematic, explicit structure as can be seen in international SEL frameworks (CASEL, 2020; Huynh et al., 2022; Phan, 2021; Tran & Le, 2023).

Findings from the study also reveal an important lack of emphasis on training pre-service EFL teachers to explicitly use SEL concepts and address social emotional issues that may arise in their classroom. Although SEL-related topics or concepts are mentioned in the curriculum, they are not systematically and explicitly addressed; therefore, pre-service teachers fail to use SEL concepts in practice. EFL teacher trainers expressed concerns that SEL is treated as an abstract concept and highlighted the need for explicit training. Classroom observations also showed that pre-service teachers could not use SEL concepts explicitly and often overlooked opportunities to address students' social and emotional issues during their lessons.

Finally, the little emphasis on SEL assessment in the teacher training program is especially concerning. Effective SEL assessment enables teachers to gather and interpret important data, adapt instructions to meet students' needs, and measure the impact of SEL practices on student outcomes (Corcoran & Tormey, 2012; Marlow & Inman, 2001). However, many pre-service teachers are underprepared in this area due to a lack of training in selecting and using appropriate assessment tools. This gap is understandable in the context of Vietnam's exam-oriented education system, which prioritizes cognitive achievements over SECs (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Kataoka et al., 2020; Saito et al. 2008). Without adequate training in this area, pre-service EFL teachers may fail to assess their students' SECs and adapt their teaching practices accordingly. As what is not assessed is often not valued, pre-service teachers may continue to internalise the idea that SEL is optional rather than essential.

This implicit and inconsistent nature of training may lead to variations in how SEL is understood and applied across different pre-service EFL teachers. The curriculum's strong focus on psychological and pedagogical foundations gives them a theoretical understanding of teaching, but its implicit approach to SEL means the pre-service teachers often perceive SEL as abstract rather than as a concrete professional competence (Lawlor, 2016; Bridgeland et al., 2013). This fragmented perception translates into fragmented practice. Consequently, although pre-service teachers intuitively encourage collaboration or empathy, they lack the explicit strategies to intentionally design and deliver SEL-rich lessons (Huynh et al., 2022; Phan, 2021). The neglect of SEL assessment further limits their capacity to evaluate and support students' SEL. Without training, they tended to ignore students' social and emotional issues or adapt their teaching practices accordingly. As a result, pre-service teachers often practise SEL reactively and inconsistently, lacking the confidence to integrate SEL systematically into their classrooms.

Taken together, the findings highlight both the promise and the limitations of implicit SEL training as well as its direct influences on pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices. National policies promote holistic development but lack actionable strategies; teacher trainers advocate for SEL but often depend on experience; curricula put uneven and implicit emphasis on different SECs and SEL instructional competence components. These contradictions leave pre-service teachers valuing SEL in principle but lacking the formal knowledge, personal SECs and instructional skills to implement it effectively. Addressing these gaps requires a more comprehensive and intentional approach to SEL training, combining the strengths of implicit modelling with structured opportunities for reflection, explicit instruction and assessment, and supported by explicit policies to ensure that SEL is no longer an incidental by-product of general pedagogy but an explicit, teachable and assessable component of teacher training.

7.3. Recommendations for Enhancing SEL Integration in EFL Teacher Education

The findings of this study indicate growing awareness and positive perceptions of SEL; however, current SEL training remains insufficient and largely implicit, resulting in pre-service teachers having a fragmented formal understanding, relying on intuitive practices, and being inadequately prepared to integrate SEL effectively into their teaching. These findings indicate the urgent need for more explicit, targeted and comprehensive training in SEL within Vietnamese EFL teacher education programs. To address this need, the following subsections will propose strategic recommendations on national policy review, institutional integration, stakeholder collaboration and continuous professional development. These recommendations can bridge the gap between policy, training, perception and practice to ensure that future EFL teachers are fully equipped to foster student holistic development.

7.3.1. Strengthening SEL integration into national educational policies

For SEL to be fully embedded in teacher education, it must be explicitly recognized and supported at the policy level. Vietnam's existing education policies emphasize holistic student development and teachers' role in this process; however, they lack clear directives and concrete guidelines on how teachers should systematically integrate SEL into their daily teaching practices. There are no specific SEL frameworks, professional standards nor specific training for both students and teachers, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent SEL understanding and practices across educational institutions. To ensure systematic and sustainable SEL implementation, policymakers should develop a comprehensive National SEL Framework that outlines explicit learning outcomes, specific indicators, assessment criteria for both students and teachers.

7.3.1.1. Developing a National SEL Framework for Vietnamese Students

Currently, SEL-related skills are embedded implicitly within Vietnam's General Education Curriculum under broad educational goals such as life skills education, character education, moral education, civic education, citizenship education or qualities and general competencies (MOET, 2018; Tran & Le, 2023). However, without an explicit, structured articulation of SEL skills in the learning objectives, content areas or assessment criteria across different grade levels, textbook writers, teachers and assessors may find it difficult to operationalize SEL in actual classroom practice. This may lead to the risk that SEL will either be overlooked or inconsistently applied across different educators and schools.

To address this gap, policymakers should establish a national SEL framework for Vietnamese students that clearly defines the five core SECs based on well-established international frameworks such as CASEL's, but still preserve and even modernize and

extend Vietnam's cultural and educational contexts by refining their definitions, sub-skills and behavioural indicators. For example, SEL should now involve more student-centred indicators such as mutual respect along with respect for authority; equal, collaborative participation instead of reliance on the others; constructive conflict resolution instead of avoidance; critical thinking instead of unquestioning compliance; and healthy emotional expression instead of suppression.

This framework should provide clear, structured learning objectives for different educational levels to ensure a progressive and developmentally appropriate approach (Durlak et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2019). At the primary education level, the framework should emphasize basic emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, empathy, cooperation and foundational decision-making abilities. Activities such as storytelling, group discussions, role-playing and cooperative games can be incorporated into daily lessons to help children develop these skills naturally. Moving to secondary level, SEL instruction could become more advanced, equipping learners with self-reflection, ethical decision-making, critical thinking, resilience, stress management and conflict resolution skills through activities like real-world problem-solving, perspective-taking exercises, debates and collaborative learning projects (Yoder, 2014). This framework could also address digital citizenship and responsible online communication, which are particularly relevant in the modern, technology-driven world (Downes, 2012; Siemens, 2005).

To ensure that SEL is an integral part of the educational process, it need to be treated as a measurable component of student development, therefore, formal SEL assessment tools based on the SEL framework should be incorporated into the curriculum (Dinh et al., 2021; Greenberg et al. 2017; Zhou & Ee, 2012). Assessment tools may include self-assessments, peer evaluations, teacher observations and performance-based assessments, which can be used in combination to ensure a holistic evaluation of students' SECs (Weissberg et al., 2015; Merrell, 2011). To ensure consistency and effectiveness, SEL assessment criteria should be standardized across schools, but still allow for adaptability to local contexts. Schools should integrate SEL elements into existing evaluation practices to ensure student holistic development. Teachers need to be trained on how to assess SEL effectively and how to use assessment data to inform teaching practices, providing students with opportunities for continuous and holistic improvement.

In summary, when a National SEL Framework for Vietnamese Students is established, it can explicitly define key social-emotional skills, their developmental milestones and expected outcomes for Vietnamese students. It will guide explicit and systematic SEL instruction and assessment, ensuring that students' SECs are prioritized in Vietnam's education system, developed intentionally and measured consistently.

7.3.1.2. Developing a National SEL Framework for Vietnamese Teachers

Vietnam's current teacher education standards lack explicit guidelines for integrating SEL into teacher training and professional development. Although the Professional Standards for Teachers of General Education Institutions (MOET, 2018) acknowledges the importance of teacher ethics, student engagement and creating positive learning environments, it does not explicitly require teachers to develop or assess SECs for students. Without clear standards, SEL remains an implicit expectation and an abstract concept rather than a professional, measurable pedagogical competence, leading to inconsistent understanding and implementation. The lack of systematic SEL training leaves future educators relying on personal experiences, informal strategies or optional workshops rather than structured, research-based strategies (Fleming & Bay, 2004; Tran & Le, 2023). As a result, they cannot model, facilitate and assess SEL effectively.

To address this gap, policymakers could consider formally integrating SEL into national teacher training and assessment standards. One essential step is revising MOET's Professional Standards for Teachers to explicitly outline core teacher competencies such as SECs and SEL instructional competencies to ensure that SEL can be systematically embedded within pre-service teacher education, in-service professional development and daily classroom practices. To realize this goal, Vietnam could establish a national SEL framework specifically designed for EFL teachers. This framework should explicitly define the five core SECs, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

The framework should also add a sixth domain - SEL instructional competence along with its specific components, which could include applying pedagogical and psychological principles, explicitly incorporating SEL concepts into instruction, modeling SECs for students, organizing SEL-integrated activities to help students develop SECs, and assessing students' SECs. The explicit inclusion of SEL Instructional Competence indicates that teachers must not only possess SECs but also know how to teach, model and assess them in their teaching practices. This framework would guide systematic, research-based SEL training, equipping teachers (not only pre-service but also in-service) with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively integrate SEL into their teaching and support students' holistic development.

This framework will also offer a solid foundation for assessing teachers' SECs and SEL instructional competence. Based on this framework, Vietnam's teacher evaluation systems can incorporate SEL into assessment criteria to systematically evaluate teachers' ability to foster students' SECs. For example, classroom observations can be frequently used to assess teachers' ability to create socially and emotionally supportive environments; lesson plans can be evaluated to ensure SEL integration in instruction; and teaching portfolios can be required to document SEL strategies and student progress.

Additionally, self-assessments, peer feedback and student surveys could be used to help teachers reflect on their social competence, emotional intelligence and effectiveness in fostering SECs for their students.

In summary, to promote SEL in EFL teacher education, Vietnam needs to establish explicit professional standards, national SEL frameworks for students and teachers, and structured assessment mechanisms. These national-level reforms can bridge the gap between policy, training, perceptions and practice, ensuring that SEL is an essential component of EFL teacher training programs.

7.3.2. Applying four approaches to integrating SEL into EFL teacher education

One of the most pressing challenges identified in this study is the lack of structured and standardized SEL training in pre-service teacher education. To address this gap, education institutions could consider incorporating SEL as a core component of teacher training in a systematic and intentional manner, covering both personal SECs and SEL instructional competence. This process could begin with a comprehensive review of existing learning outcomes, content areas, teaching methods and assessment strategies to identify opportunities where SEL can be meaningfully embedded. Then, the implementation of SEL integration can be achieved through the four complementary approaches identified by Dusenbury et al. (2015): free-standing SEL lessons, integrating SEL into academic content, integrating SEL into general teaching practices and adopting SEL as a campus-wide initiative. These approaches need to be adapted to align with the specific demands of contemporary Vietnamese education and EFL instruction.

7.3.2.1. Offering free-standing courses or modules for SEL training

To ensure explicit SEL instruction, teacher education programs could incorporate free-standing courses or dedicated SEL modules and workshops that can deliberately develop SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers. These modules could provide formal frameworks, instructional strategies and specific examples of SEL. As the findings of the current study and others such as Huynh et al. (2022) and Tran & Le (2023) emphasize, many Vietnamese EFL teachers lack foundational understanding of SEL concepts and how to operationalize them in practice, these dedicated SEL modules are very important in providing formal SEL training to address the gap.

Firstly, it is necessary to foster personal SECs such as emotion regulation, empathy, relationship skills and responsible decision-making for pre-service teachers. For example, lessons could focus on developing self-awareness for pre-service teachers through reflective journaling about teaching experiences, where pre-service teachers could analyze moments when they felt frustrated with a disengaged student. This activity will help them recognize and regulate emotions and develop empathy and problem solving skills. Responsible decision-making could be fostered through group problem-

solving activities where pre-service teachers collaboratively address common classroom issues such as student cheating or bullying. In these activities, they could evaluate the consequences of punitive versus restorative strategies, and then make decisions that prioritize student growth (CASEL, 2020). With this training, pre-service teachers will be better prepared to manage emotions, build positive student relationships, and create emotionally supportive learning environments to enhance both student engagement and language acquisition (Lawlor, 2016).

Moving to SEL instructional competence, teacher education programs could incorporate free-standing modules specifically designed to help teacher candidates identify, model, teach and assess SECs in their students. These modules should provide explicit training on psychological and pedagogical foundations as well as formal knowledge of SEL (SELIC 1). For example, through practicum, case studies, classroom simulations, peer discussions and guided reflections, pre-service teachers can practice addressing real-world classroom challenges, such as language anxiety, shame, student conflicts and cultural sensitivity (SELIC 2). They also need training in modelling strong SECs such as empathy, emotional intelligence and positive communication during their teaching practices (SELIC 3). A practical workshop, for example, could have them role-play scenarios where a student feels excluded due to limited English proficiency, requiring them to use active listening, empathy and scaffolding strategies to support the student.

Free-standing modules should also require pre-service teachers to design activities like collaborative speaking tasks, conflict resolution exercises, and role-playing scenarios to foster both linguistic proficiency and social-emotional skills (SELIC 4). Additionally, they need to be trained in assessing students' SECs through reflective journals, peer feedback and teacher observations (SELIC 5). For example, in a speaking activity, students might role-play ordering food in a restaurant and practice social awareness by acknowledging cultural norms and showing politeness. The pre-service teachers' lesson plan could be required to include explicit reflections on how this lesson plan fosters not only linguistic competence but also social emotional skills such as understanding the perspectives of different speakers in cross-cultural communication.

7.3.2.2. Integrating SEL into course content within the EFL teacher training program

Another approach is to integrate SEL into course content to ensure that SEL is not an isolated component but an integral part of teacher education (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Markowitz et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Huck et al., 2023). This solution is feasible and effective in the context of the EFL teacher training program as lessons naturally offer opportunities to integrate SEL-related content.

Regarding SECs, they can be integrated into all the existing courses of the curriculum. For example, reading comprehension activities can be revised to promote social awareness by exploring characters' emotions and perspectives. Writing and speaking lessons could also explicitly integrate SECs. For example, in a persuasive essay writing lesson, pre-service teachers can be encouraged to consider diverse perspectives and practice responsible decision-making by making arguments on real-world topics. These lessons can enhance not only writing skills but also ethical reasoning and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, in speaking lessons, debates can simultaneously activate and foster all the five core SECs. For instance, a debate on AI tools could help pre-service teachers practice articulating ideas, listening to opposing viewpoints and engaging in respectful disagreement.

Regarding SEL instructional competence, its training can be embedded into psychological and pedagogical courses, teaching methodology, teaching practices, fieldwork and practicum. Pre-service teachers must be trained to recognize opportunities for SEL integration, and then embed SEL meaningfully into lesson planning, activity design, giving instructions, giving feedback and assessment. (Huynh et al., 2022). In *Educational Psychology*, they could be trained how to apply knowledge of developmental psychology to adapt lessons for different age groups. In *Teaching Methodology* courses, they could be required to analyze sample lesson plans to identify opportunities for integrating SEL elements. In *Teaching Practices or Practicum*, they could be tasked with designing SEL-integrated activities. For example, a listening comprehension task could include identifying emotional cues in the audio such as joy or frustration; then a post-listening discussion could be designed to focus on the issues raised in the audio material to foster other SECs for students. These activities demonstrate to pre-service teachers how SEL can be proactively, purposefully but still naturally embedded into everyday lesson content without detracting from the overall academic goals (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Frey et al., 2019).

7.3.2.3. Integrating SEL in everyday training practices

Integrating SEL into everyday teaching practices within the EFL teacher training curriculum can make SEL an integral part of the teacher preparation process and classroom routines (Fleming & Bay, 2004). These practices may include those proposed by Yoder (2014): student-centered discipline, positive teacher language, responsibility and choice, warmth and support, cooperative learning, meaningful classroom discussions, self-assessment and reflection, balanced instruction, academic press, and SEL competence-building (Yoder, 2014). These practices not only align with global best teaching practices but also support Vietnam's competency-based educational reforms. If EFL teacher trainers emphasize and model these practices consistently, pre-service

teachers can not only develop their own SECs but also adopt and replicate them in their future classrooms to foster SECs for their students.

For example, EFL teacher trainers can model student-centered discipline by having pre-service teachers co-create classroom rules. This might include establishing rules and tips for group discussions to ensure that each participant contributes equitably and that differing perspectives are respected. This approach fosters responsibility, self-management and a sense of ownership. Similarly, teacher trainers can model positive teacher language by providing constructive feedback that acknowledges effort and encourages improvement. These activities can nurture a supportive classroom atmosphere (Zins et al., 2004).

Cooperative learning is another effective strategy to enhance teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills. For instance, teacher trainers could organize cooperative learning tasks where pre-service teachers are required to work together, share resources and solve real-world challenges. In addition, integrating reflective practices and meaningful classroom discussions into the training process can deepen pre-service teachers' self-awareness and critical thinking. Teacher trainers could guide pre-service teachers in maintaining reflective journals during their micro-teaching sessions or practicum and encourage them to identify areas for growth and plan actionable strategies for improvement. These practices can enhance not only SECs but also SEL instructional competence for pre-service teachers.

7.3.2.4. Institutionalizing SEL as a campus-wide scheme for broader impact

Beyond the classroom-level integration, it is necessary to institutionalize SEL as a campus-wide campaign to ensure its unified and consistent integration into the entire culture and operations of the teacher education institution. This requires a collaborative team to mobilize all the available resources and efforts (Humphries et al., 2018; Huck et at., 2023; LaRusso et al., 2009; Mahoney et al., 2018). This team may include teacher trainers, pre-service teachers, institutional leaders and other support staff, who need to work together to create a consistent environment for SEL and reduce the current fragmentation. In this manner, SEL can be woven comprehensively, systematically and sustainably in all aspects and corners of the teacher training institution.

Within this collaborative team, teacher trainers play a central role in proposing, delivering SEL training and modeling SEL practices to ensure that pre-service teachers can understand SEL theories and practice SEL in their educational contexts (Buchanan et al., 2009; Huck et at., 2023; Jones et al., 2013; Zinsser et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers, in turn, need to actively participate in SEL training. Institutional leaders need to provide strategic direction, allocate resources and establish policies that prioritize SEL. Finally, support staff such as counselors and librarians, contribute to creating a supportive campus environment. Altogether, the whole institution can develop a shared

commitment to implementing SEL consistently. This campus-wide approach can eliminate the inconsistencies that arise when SEL practices depend on individual teacher trainers or isolated course designs, as revealed in the findings of this study.

In summary, if the four approaches to SEL integration (i.e. free-standing lessons, integrating SEL into academic content, general teaching practices and school-wide scheme) can be implemented simultaneously, Vietnamese EFL teacher education programs can ensure successful SEL integration. Each approach offers unique opportunities to prepare pre-service EFL teachers for the social and emotional dimensions of their EFL classroom.

7.3.3. Applying the SAFE principles for SEL: Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit

To further promote SEL in Vietnamese teacher education programs, this study recommends adopting the SAFE principles (Durlak et al., 2011): Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit. These principles can ensure that SEL is delivered in a step-by-step manner (Sequenced), engages pre-service teachers in hands-on, interactive activities (Active), maintains a clear emphasis on developing SEL skills (Focused), and explicitly integrates SEL into teacher training curricula (Explicit).

7.3.3.1. Sequenced and Balanced

A sequenced approach ensures a connected and structured development of competencies, which will allow pre-service teachers to build SECs and SEL instructional competence progressively. This approach involves organizing SEL activities in a logical progression, starting with foundational competencies and advancing to more complex and instructional competencies. Initially, pre-service teachers could focus on self-awareness and self-management to develop self-understanding and self-regulation. As they progress, the curriculum could emphasize social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Finally, the curriculum could target SEL instructional competence components, training pre-service teachers to model, teach and assess SECs in their future classrooms. This step-by-step approach ensures that they develop both SECs and SEL instructional competence in a cohesive and progressive manner.

It is also necessary to ensure balanced coverage of all five core SECs, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Findings from this study reveal an uneven emphasis across the competencies. Self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making are given more emphasis; self-awareness and social awareness receive much less attention. This imbalance may limit the holistic development of pre-service teachers; therefore, teacher education programs should address this imbalance by designing activities that give equal attention to all of the five SECs.

Similarly, balanced emphasis need to be given to all the components of SEL instructional competence. The findings reveal disparities in proficiency across the five components of SEL instructional competence. While pre-service teachers demonstrate strengths in applying psychological and pedagogical principles and designing SEL-related activities, significant gaps remain in addressing social emotional issues, modeling SECs, and assessing students' SECs. Addressing these gaps requires targeted interventions, for example workshops on recognizing and responding to students' emotional needs, role-playing exercises to practice modeling SECs, and training on using observation rubrics for assessing students' SECs. This balance can ensure that pre-service EFL teachers are equipped with a well-rounded set of skills to promote SEL in their classrooms.

7.3.3.2. Active

Next, the curriculum needs to provide pre-service EFL teachers with active and hands-on opportunities to develop, activate and reinforce SECs and SEL instructional competence during their pre-service training at the pedagogical university (Kress et al., 2004). This principle ensures that pre-service teachers are not passive recipients of information but actively engaged in practical activities that enable them to practice and develop SECs and SEL instructional competence.

To develop SECs, the curriculum should offer active and targeted activities that provide meaningful opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice and refine these competencies. For example, they can be placed in role-play where they need to make decisions or manage conflicts. They could also be placed in collaborative projects or interactive discussions, where they need to understand and manage themselves, work collaboratively, coordinate efforts, share responsibilities and address different perspectives. More importantly, reflective debriefing sessions should follow all of these activities to reflect on the learning experience, especially the social and emotional dimensions of the learning process alongside the academic domain. During these sessions, pre-service teachers can analyze their emotional responses, evaluate their decision-making processes and identify any areas for improvements. These active learning activities create meaningful opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice and refine their own SECs.

To enhance SEL instructional competence, pre-service teachers need to engage in practical assignments where they are required to integrate SEL principles into their lessons within real or simulated teaching contexts. Supervisors should model and guide pre-service teachers in addressing social and emotional issues during teaching practices. For instance, a supervisor might recommend providing scaffolded support for a shy student by pairing them with more confident peers in group work. Supervisors should also provide hands-on training for pre-service teachers in designing SEL-integrated activities that align with lesson objectives. For example, in a lesson on global

environmental issues, they could design a debate where students can practice collaboration, social awareness and responsible decision making. Finally, supervisors should guide pre-service teachers in assessing students' SECs using both formal and informal channels. After delivering a lesson, pre-service teachers could engage in self-reflections, peer review or supervisor assessment regarding all the academic, social and emotional aspects of their teaching practices.

7.3.3.3. Focused

The word "focused" in this context means deliberately allocating specific and sufficient time, resources and attention to ensure that SECs and SEL instructional competence can be thoroughly developed as core competencies. It involves structured and intentional efforts to integrate SEL into the curriculum through dedicated modules, targeted activities and practical applications rather than treating it as a supplementary or incidental topic (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Durlak et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2017; Markowitz et al., 2016). The principle of "focus" also requires the curriculum to develop and implement systematic assessment measures for SEL competencies, utilizing both formative and summative assessment strategies. This focused approach ensures that SEL is prioritized with clear objectives, measurable outcomes and multiple opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop, practice, reflect on and apply SECs and SEL instructional competence in a focused manner. It emphasizes depth and intentionality, making SEL an integral and sustainable component of EFL teacher education.

7.3.3.4. Explicit

The finding that many teacher trainers and pre-service teachers already do SEL implicitly is encouraging, but to optimize SEL's benefits, it must be combined with explicit implementation (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Tran & Le, 2023). This explicit SEL integration includes providing clearly defined learning outcomes, formal SEL theories, explicit instructional strategies and assessment tools, and ensuring that SEL is viewed not as an "extra" but an integral pillar of the training curricula. This principle is necessary for ensuring clarity, transparency and intentionality of the integration of SEL into Vietnamese EFL teacher education (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2007; Jennings et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Waajid et al., 2013).

First, explicit SEL integration requires *defining and articulating SEL objectives explicitly* across multiple levels of the EFL teacher education curriculum, from the overall framework to component course syllabi, specific lessons and other related documents. It is also necessary to clearly communicate SEL objectives to the pre-service teachers so that they can understand, model and apply SEL principles effectively in their

classrooms, transforming SEL from an intuitive, incidental occurrence into an intentional, well-informed pedagogical practice.

Second, based on these explicit SEL objectives, teacher trainers need to provide *explicit instruction* on both SECs and SEL instructional competence. This involves breaking down the abstract concept of SEL into practical, teachable components. Trainers should not assume that pre-service teachers will naturally acquire these competencies; instead, they need to offer explicit instructions, concrete examples, demonstrations and modeling of these competencies so that pre-service teachers can learn about, practise and reflect on SEL competencies (Mahoney et al., 2018). For instance, trainers could illustrate how to facilitate peer collaboration that nurtures empathy, or how to respond calmly and constructively to classroom conflict, thereby explicitly teaching these SEL skills to pre-service teachers.

Third, it is necessary to help pre-service teachers to build an *explicit vocabulary* related to SEL (e.g., empathy, respect, emotional regulation, perspective-taking and conflict resolution) so that they can articulate and address social and emotional issues or skills explicitly and effectively in their teaching practices (Denton, 2008; Zins et al., 2004). Classroom observations conducted as part of this study reveal that many pre-service teachers lack the necessary SEL-related vocabulary and, as a result, often fail to reference SEL terminology or specific skills. This vocabulary would enable them to engage in meaningful conversations with their students or colleagues about SEL issues such as emotions, relationships and decision-making.

Finally, explicit SEL integration requires *explicit assessment* of SECs and SEL instructional competence to ensure that SEL becomes an observable, measurable and intentional component of teacher education, subject to reflection, growth and accountability rather than general impressions or subjective judgment. Classroom observations from this study indicate that due to the absence of such explicit criteria, SEL-related performance often goes unnoticed or unaddressed. To address this gap, teacher education programs could develop and implement clear rubrics and assessment tools that directly target SECs and SEL instructional competence. For example, rubrics for oral presentations can include SEL-focused criteria such as "demonstrates respect for others' opinions" or "shows confidence and empathy when responding;" follow-up activities can incorporate SEL reflection sections where students evaluate how they collaborate, respond to challenges or adapt to diverse perspectives. When assessing teaching practices, rubrics should include descriptors such as "models emotional regulation under pressure," "fosters inclusive group dynamics," or "responds empathetically to student needs."

In summary, the SAFE principles (Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit) provide practical guidelines for integrating SEL into teacher training programs. A sequenced

structure ensures that SEL training progresses from foundational to more complex competencies. Active engagement through role-playing, collaborative projects and reflective practices allows pre-service teachers to master SEL skills actively. Focused activities ensure the depth and intentionality of SEL training. Explicit instruction provides clarity with clear objectives and assessment criteria. Altogether, these principles can ensure that SEL is integrated systematically into teacher education.

7.3.4. Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration for SEL implementation

The successful implementation of SEL in EFL teacher education requires a collaborative effort among key stakeholders, including policymakers, curriculum developers, teacher training institutions, school administrators, researchers, classroom teachers, community and family (Hellman & Milling, 2020; LaRusso et al., 2009; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). With this collaboration and shared responsibility, SEL implementation will become coherent, consistent and sustainable.

The first step is to establish partnerships between pedagogical universities, international researchers and SEL experts to facilitate knowledge exchange and best practices in SEL implementation. These collaborations can support curriculum development and research on SEL, aligning Vietnam's teacher training programs with global trends and best practices. Additionally, to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance, it is essential to develop localized SEL training materials and resources (e.g., training manuals, teaching materials, assessment tools) tailored to Vietnamese educational contexts (Tran & Le, 2023). By fostering institutional collaboration and culturally responsive SEL resources, Vietnamese EFL teacher education programs can create a sustainable framework for integrating SEL, ensuring that future educators are equipped to enhance both language acquisition and students' SECs.

It is also necessary to strengthen partnerships between teacher education programs and K-12 schools to bridge the gap between training and practical application. Teacher education institutions should collaborate with schools to create real-world opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply SEL principles in authentic classroom settings (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Huck et al., 2023). Mentorship programs are also necessary in this regard. For example, experienced school teachers can be paired with pre-service teachers to practise SEL strategies such as fostering collaboration during group activities or using empathetic communication to address student anxieties. These guided, hands-on experiences not only strengthen pre-service teachers' pedagogical competencies but also help them develop SECs and SEL instructional competence.

Building on these partnerships, joint workshops involving teacher educators and school teachers are essential to adapt SEL frameworks to Vietnamese cultural and educational contexts. These workshops could focus on integrating SEL principles like empathy, self-regulation and responsible decision-making into lesson planning and classroom

management strategies. For instance, participants might co-develop lesson plans that teach English skills through role-playing scenarios where students practice resolving conflicts or expressing emotions. When explicitly linking SEL objectives with language learning goals, these workshops provide educators with practical tools to align academic goals with social emotional outcomes (Kress et al., 2004).

Family and community involvement is another important component of successful SEL implementation (Bridgeland et al., 2013; CASEL, 2020). In Vietnam, where families play a central role in education, engaging parents in SEL can ensure that these principles are reinforced at home. Additionally, pedagogical universities could partner with community organizations to create real-world opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice SEL skills. For instance, pedagogical universities could collaborate with local organizations or societies and create opportunities for pre-service teachers to teach English voluntarily for disadvantaged children in the local area. These volunteer activities can not only improve their language instruction skills, but also enhance their empathy and responsibility.

In summary, collaborative implementation and stakeholder engagement are essential to successfully integrate SEL into EFL teacher education. This approach can overcome the limitations of fragmented, implicit training, and ensure SEL becomes a sustainable part of teacher education in Vietnam.

7.3.5. Establishing continuous professional development programs for SEL

To ensure that SEL training does not end with pre-service education, continuous professional development (CPD) programs must be established for both teacher trainers and in-service teachers so that they can continuously refine their SECs and SEL instructional competence.

The most urgent step is to offer mandatory continuous professional development programs for the teacher trainers themselves to build their capacity to mentor teacher candidates in SEL, ensuring consistent and sustainable SEL training across the teacher education program. These CPD programs should provide teacher trainers with formal SEL frameworks and theories to enhance their understanding of SEL principles. In addition, professional workshops should provide teacher trainers with practical techniques to effectively foster SECs and SEL instructional competence in pre-service teachers. Collaboration among teacher trainers also needs to be emphasized to enhance the effectiveness of SEL integration. In CPD programs, such as regular workshops, peer-learning communities, and cross-institutional training initiatives, teacher trainers can share best practices, co-develop SEL-integrated courses or modules and address shared challenges. For example, trainers could work together to create lesson plans which integrate SEL objectives. This collaborative approach ensures the contextual relevance and consistency of SEL training across the whole program.

In addition to pre-service training, in-service training is essential for pre-service teachers as they transition into professional roles in the real world of work. CPD allows them to refine their SECs and SEL instructional competence through real-world applications and adaptations to the realities of the classroom. As one trainer noted, *"I don't think any teacher who is starting is ever prepared enough... they can learn a lot by doing... they won't fully learn these skills until they have their own class and they're on their own."* Structured in-service training programs should focus on advanced SEL strategies such as managing diverse classrooms or integrating SEL into differentiated instruction. Additionally, mentorship programs could pair early-career teachers with experienced educators to provide personalized guidance on how to handle the social and emotional aspects of language learning effectively. For instance, mentors might support teachers in developing strategies to encourage participation from shy students, offering scaffolding techniques and positive reinforcement to build confidence and engagement.

To foster ongoing promotion of SEL, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can be established so that EFL teachers can share SEL resources, activities, classroom experiences, challenges or adaptations to specific contexts. PLCs can take the form of peer discussion groups, mentoring networks or online forums, providing a structured yet flexible space for teachers to engage in SEL-focused professional development. For example, EFL teachers could participate in monthly SEL reflection sessions, where they analyze case studies on student motivation, classroom conflicts or language anxiety and discuss practical interventions. Guided reflection prompts could encourage teachers to assess their own emotional regulation, empathy and communication skills, helping them refine their approach to fostering a supportive learning environment. PLCs could include lesson-sharing, where teachers present SEL-integrated lesson plans and receive feedback from their colleagues. For instance, an EFL teacher might showcase a debate activity that promotes responsible decision-making and perspective-taking while other teachers contribute ideas on improving student engagement and emotional safety.

Finally, through CPD programs, it is necessary to shape positive perceptions of SEL among EFL teacher trainers and pre-service EFL teachers. Teachers' perceptions significantly influence their willingness to adopt SEL practices (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Zinsser et al., 2014). To address the perception that SEL is secondary to academic goals or SEL wastes time, teacher education programs should emphasize the interconnectedness between SEL and cognitive development (Kress et al., 2004). Evidence from Durlak et al. (2011), which shows how SEL enhances academic performance, could illustrate this importance. Additionally, case studies from EFL classrooms where SEL practices reduced language anxiety and increased participation can provide authentic examples of SEL's multiple benefits.

In summary, to integrate SEL into teacher education programs, there need to be systematic and collaborative efforts. It is necessary to strengthen SEL into national policies, adopt all the four approaches to SEL integration (free-standing, integrated in contents, general teaching practices and campus-wide), apply the SAFE principles (Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit), foster collaborative stakeholder engagement, and support ongoing professional development. All of these efforts can ensure that SEL is not only embedded into educational policies but actively practiced, refined and institutionalized as a foundational component of EFL teacher education. These strategies will foster a more emotionally intelligent, socially competent and academically successful generation of teachers and learners.

7.4. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

This study provides valuable findings about the perceptions and practices of pre-service EFL teachers regarding SEL at a pedagogical university in Vietnam; however, its exploratory nature and methodological limitations, including a limited sample size, reliance on self-reported data and a restricted observation period, indicate areas that need further investigation. The following sections discuss these limitations in detail and accordingly make recommendations for further research.

7.4.1. Sample size and generalizability

This study was conducted with pre-service EFL teachers within a single pedagogical university in Vietnam (VPU) during the academic year 2023–2024. This single-site design means that the results primarily reflect the SEL practices, perceptions and training of the selected university, which may differ from those of other pedagogical institutions in Vietnam. Therefore, the findings of this dissertation are bounded to this population. To enhance generalizability, future research should incorporate EFL teacher training curricula from different pedagogical universities across the country. This larger and inclusive sample would offer a more comprehensive understanding of SEL in Vietnamese teacher education, hence better informing national policies aimed at integrating SEL into Vietnam's teacher education system.

Additionally, cross-cultural research could explore SEL integration in EFL teacher training programs globally and examine how pre-service EFL teachers' SEL practices and perceptions vary across different educational and cultural contexts. Findings from these cross-cultural studies could inform the development of best practices applicable across diverse settings and support the international advancement of SEL in teacher education. Expanding the scope of research in these ways would not only validate and extend the findings from this study but also contribute to a broader evidence base for SEL implementation in teacher training worldwide.

Finally, based on the research design and findings of the current study, future research could also expand the focus to include other subjects such as mathematics, science, history or arts. These future studies could investigate how SEL can be effectively integrated across various disciplines in the Vietnamese educational context. The methodologies and frameworks utilized in this study, especially the framework for SECs and SEL instructional competence which has been developed for pre-service EFL teachers and then validated empirically, can offer a strong foundation for investigating SEL implementation in subjects other than English. This expanded understanding could further promote SEL across the Vietnamese national educational system.

7.4.2. Cross-sectional design and temporal limitations

This study adopts a cross-sectional design to examine SEL training, perceptions and practices during the 2023–2024 academic year. This time-horizon could only assess the current state of SEL in EFL teacher education at a specific point in time. It could not account for the dynamic nature of social emotional competencies (SECs) and SEL instructional competence over time. According to Durlak et al. (2011), Lawlor (2016) and Pentón Herrera (2022), SECs and SEL instructional competence evolve over time with ongoing experience, training and exposure to varied classroom contexts.

This limitation implies the need for longitudinal research to evaluate the effectiveness of specific SEL training programs, or track how SEL-related skills develop throughout pre-service teacher training and into their professional teaching careers. This longitudinal time horizon would enable researchers to follow pre-service EFL teachers from their initial pre-service training through their early years as in-service teachers to assess how SECs and SEL instructional competence are developed and refined over time in real-world teaching experiences and continued professional development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Beyond understanding the development of SECs and SEL instructional competence in pre-service teachers, it is essential to investigate the broader impact of SEL on students. As this study focuses on the perceptions and practices of pre-service EFL teachers, it does not assess how SEL influences students' academic performance, SECs and classroom engagement. Therefore, future research could explore how specific SEL interventions impact students' language proficiency, participation, emotional regulation and interpersonal skills, as well as teacher well-being. Examining the relationship among these variables would provide empirical evidence for promoting SEL.

7.4.3. Restricted observation period and limited document analysis scope

This study also has significant limitations related to methods of data collection. These limitations include reliance on self-reported data, a restricted observation period and a

limited scope of document analysis. First, the quantitative component relied on self-reported questionnaires to gather data about pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences of SEL practices. Although useful, self-reported data are susceptible to social desirability and recall biases, which may lead the participants to either overstate or understate their actual SEL perceptions and practices (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). This may affect the accuracy of the findings as they reflect subjective views rather than verifiable actions.

To address the above limitations, the study has ensured that this source of self-reported data is complemented with other more objective sources, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews with EFL teacher trainers, focus group interview with pre-service EFL teachers and classroom observations. However, this qualitative strand is restricted by a small sample size and short observation period. Due to time constraints, only five interviews were conducted with EFL teacher trainers. Similarly, only one focus group discussion with 13 pre-service EFL teachers was conducted. Although these interviews provided rich and detailed perspectives, the small sample size limited the collection of diverse perspectives and practices related to SEL.

Additionally, classroom observations were conducted over a short period of time, which restricted the ability to observe the variations and evolution of SEL practices across the entire EFL teacher training curriculum. According to Schonert-Reichl (2017) and Jennings & Greenberg (2009), SEL practices are highly dynamic and influenced by different factors such as instructional goals, classroom interactions and teacher-student interactions, which vary daily. The short observation period, therefore, may fail to show a complete picture of how SEL is integrated into the training process and how pre-service EFL teachers practice SEL.

Finally, document analysis was conducted but it only focused on the general curriculum frame and their syllabi. Due to constraints related to time and human resources, document analysis could not extend to analyzing other related documents such as teaching materials or lesson plans. Although curriculum analysis could reveal how SEL principles are formally integrated into program structure, the lack of analysis of specific teaching materials limits the ability to evaluate how SEL principles are operationalized in practice. This limitation narrows the scope of the study's conclusions about the actual integration of SEL within the EFL teacher education program.

To address the above-discussed limitations, future research could extend the observation period to encompass more courses and teaching sessions to ensure more thorough analysis of SEL training and practices over time and across the whole curriculum. It is also necessary to expand the sample size for interviews and focus group discussion to

gather a broader and more diverse range of perspectives from EFL teacher trainers and pre-service EFL teachers. Finally, future research should broaden the scope of document analysis to include teaching materials, lesson plans and other classroom resources to understand better how SEL principles are integrated into the whole curriculum.

7.4.4. Limitations of the SEL Framework Development and Validation

Another notable limitation is related to the SEL framework which has been built for Vietnamese pre-service EFL teachers. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results show that the hypothesized factor structure of the SEL framework for Vietnamese pre-service EFL teachers aligns reasonably well with the data. However, fit indices such as the GFI, CFI and TLI fall slightly below the ideal thresholds. These limitations are understandable and acceptable given that the framework is newly developed and requires further refinement. These gaps suggest that although the model can measure dimensions of SEL competencies relevant to Vietnamese pre-service EFL teachers, further adjustments are needed to improve its precision and robustness.

Future research should focus on revising the framework to ensure a stronger fit with the data. Especially, the components and indicators of SEL instructional competence need to be reviewed, piloted and refined to ensure clarity and applicability in teacher training and classroom practice. This may require more extensive review of established SEL frameworks and educational psychology as well as expert consultation to gather profound expertise from experienced educators, researchers and SEL specialists. Subsequently, validation processes, including empirical studies and pilot testing, should be conducted to assess the reliability and effectiveness of these components in real-world teaching contexts. Finally, the refined framework need to be testes on a larger and more diverse sample of pre-service EFL teachers from various institutions and regions.

In addition, the regression model accounts for 5.6% of the variance in SEL practices, which means that the other 49.4% were unexplained. This unexplained variance indicates that other factors that influence SEL practices were not included in the current model. These missing factors highlight the need for further research to identify and explore more potential predictors influencing SEL practices such as cultural values, institutional policies and personal traits. It is also necessary to refine the existing constructs such as Perceptions of SEL, Training in SEL and Preparedness for SEL and the corresponding indicators under these broad constructs. These refinements and expansions could significantly strengthen the explanatory capacity of the model developed in the current study.

7.5. Conclusion

This study provides one of the first comprehensive exploration of how SEL is perceived and practised by pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam. The findings reveal that the EFL teacher education curriculum does include elements of SEL training; however, it puts uneven and implicit emphasis on different SECs and SEL instructional competence components. This implicit and fragmented approach to SEL training still fosters positive attitude but leads to the lack of formal SEL knowledge and intuitive practices among pre-service EFL teachers. Although they hold positive attitudes toward SEL, valuing its multiple benefits and recognizing EFL teachers' roles in promoting SEL, their knowledge remains fragmented, intuitive and predominantly experience-based, with many feeling unprepared to implement SEL effectively. Their practices in SECs and SEL instructional competence are just moderate-to-high, mostly implicit, intuitive and inconsistent. Finally, strong positive correlations among SEL training, perceptions and practices underline the important role of structured, balanced and explicit training that would equip pre-service teachers with both formal SEL knowledge and skills necessary to handle the social and emotional dimensions of the EFL classroom.

These findings are particularly significant within the context of Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum reform (MOET, 2018), which emphasizes competency-based, holistic education. They highlight both achievements and limitations of current SEL training, perceptions and practices among pre-service EFL teachers, which reveal both the promise and challenges of integrating SEL into EFL teacher training to foster holistic development for teachers and students. They also demonstrate that SEL is both essential and feasible within Vietnamese EFL teacher education if supported strategically at macro and micro levels. This study contributes a culturally specific perspective to the global discourse on SEL, showing how SEL can be adapted to align with local cultural values, educational priorities and specific fields like EFL teacher education. Future studies could expand on these findings to promote SEL in teacher education. This reform will contribute to the development of a new generation of EFL teachers who are adequately prepared not only with personal SECs but also with instructional skills necessary for impactful SEL implementation to teach English effectively in ways that support the holistic development of learners: cognitively, socially and emotionally.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for EFL Teacher Trainers

Interviewer: The researcher   Interview Code: _____

Pseudonym Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____   Time: _____ Location: _____

I. Test the digital recorders.

II. Have the participants sign the consent form; give a copy to the participant.

III. Give a brief introduction to the study

Thank you for participating in this semi-structured interview. This interview is designed to investigate your perceptions of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and how you incorporate it into your instructional practices to foster SECs and SEL instructional competencies for pre-service EFL teachers. Your responses are valuable and there are no right or wrong answers. Positive and negative feedback are equally welcome and your information will contribute to my research.

I would like to record this interview for later data analysis and I assure you that your responses will remain confidential and be used exclusively for this research. The interview should take about two hours, but you have the right to pause, skip questions or end it at any time. If you have questions during the interview, please feel free to ask. Before we begin, we'll review and sign the consent form.

Afterward, you'll receive a transcript to review for accuracy. You can make any additions or deletions at that time. Do you have any questions or concerns before we start? If not, may I begin recording now?

Thank you for your participation.

IV. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings, knowledge and experiences.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Firstly, I would like to ask you some questions about you and your job.

- How many years have you worked as an EFL teacher trainer?
- Could you describe your position and responsibilities in the EFL teacher training curriculum?
- Could you list the courses you've designed and taught within the curriculum?
Thank you!

EFL TEACHER TRAINERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

In the next section of the interview, I am going to ask you questions about your perceptions of SEL. I will be asking you what you know about SEL – don't worry if you feel you don't know much – that is not a problem as I appreciate that it is new and not everyone has been involved yet.

EFL Teacher Trainers' Knowledge of SEL

- As a teacher trainer, do you pay attention to the social and emotional dimensions of EFL teaching and learning such as empathy, resilience, perseverance, responsibility, honesty, self-regulation, optimism, compassion and cooperation?
- Are you familiar with the term "Social Emotional Learning" (SEL)?
- How would you define SEL in your own words?
- How would you define student success?
- How would you define the competence to apply SEL in EFL teaching and learning?
- How familiar are you with various methods and strategies for applying SEL in daily EFL teaching activities? Can you provide specific examples?
- Please share the channels through which you have gained knowledge about SEL.
Thank you!

EFL Teacher Trainers' Opinions about the Benefits of SEL

Next, we are going to discuss the benefits of SEL.

- Do you believe there is a need to focus on the social and emotional dimensions of EFL learning and teaching? Why or Why not?
- Besides improving English language proficiency for students, do EFL teachers need to foster social and emotional skills for students? Why or Why not?
- Who should be responsible for the social emotional dimensions of teaching and learning and why? What role does the EFL teacher play in fostering students' social and emotional skills?
- What specific social and emotional skills do you think are the most important for students in the context of EFL teaching and learning?
- What benefits do you see in integrating social and emotional dimensions into EFL learning and teaching?
- What is your opinion about the potential for the implementation of SEL in English classes at school?

EFL Teacher Trainers' Assessment of Pre-service Teachers' SECs

This section focuses on assessing pre-service EFL teachers' SECs.

- At which level do you assess your pre-service EFL teachers' SECs: poor, average, good or excellent?
- How do you assess their SECs? What methods or tools do you use?
- How do you utilize assessment data to inform your instruction?
- Have you noticed any patterns or trends in the SECs of your pre-service EFL teachers? If so, please explain.
- What are the indicators of a socially and emotionally competent/incompetent pre-service teacher?
- In your experience, what are the most common social and emotional issues among your pre-service EFL teachers? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.

Teacher Trainers' Perspectives on SEL integration in Teacher Education

Fostering pre-service EFL teachers' SECs

These questions aim to investigate how the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum at VPU fosters SECs for pre-service EFL teachers.

- Do you think it is important to foster pre-service EFL teachers' SECs?
- How does the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum at VPU develop SECs for pre-service EFL teachers?
- Can you provide examples of specific program components, activities or strategies that nurture SECs in the prospective teachers?
- How do you nurture SECs in the pre-service EFL teachers? Can you provide examples of specific strategies, activities or resources you use to promote SECs among your trainees? self-awareness? self-management? social-awareness? relationship skills? responsible decision-making?
- How often do you utilize these strategies and/or activities that you have mentioned?
- Which of the five SECs do you prioritize in your classroom? Why?
- How do you balance the academic requirements with the promotion of social and emotional development for pre-service EFL teachers?
- What would you recommend your faculty/university to do in order to foster SECs for pre-service EFL teachers?

Developing pre-service EFL teachers' SEL Instructional Competence

These questions aim to investigate your perspectives on how the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum at VPU fosters SEL Instructional Competence for pre-service EFL teachers:

- How do you define the competence to integrate SEL into EFL teaching? What components does this competence consist of?

- Do you think it is important to foster pre-service EFL teachers' competence to integrate SEL into EFL teaching? Why or Why not?

- What are the benefits of training pre-service EFL teachers on how to implement SEL in EFL teaching?

- How does the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum at VPU help pre-service teachers develop their SEL instructional competence? Can you provide examples of approaches or methods within the program that prepare pre-service EFL teachers to deal with the social and emotional dimensions of their EFL teaching?

- Do you think the EFL teacher training curriculum at VPU prepares pre-service teachers enough for their teaching in terms of SEL instructions?

- Do you consider social and emotional dimensions supplementary or a foundational component of the EFL teacher training program? Why?

- Are there specific courses that focus on social and emotional dimensions in EFL teaching? If yes, please provide examples. Do you think there should be a separate course that focuses on SEL in EFL teaching? Why or why not?

- Do you have any suggestions for promoting SEL in EFL teacher education?

- What challenges have you encountered in the process of integrating social and emotional dimensions into EFL teacher education and how have you addressed them?

- Have you received any training or professional development related to social and emotional dimensions? If so, can you describe your experiences? Do you have any plans for further professional development in this area and if so, what are your goals?

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

We have been talking about SEL, SECs, the benefits of SEL and the role/elements of SEL in EFL teacher training curriculum.

- Is there anything else about SEL that we haven't yet discussed that you would like to share? Please add any other comments you have concerning SEL.

VI. CLOSE THE INTERVIEW

Thank you very much for participating in the interview. I appreciate the time you took to complete the interview. If you have anything else to share, comment, provide feedback or ask, please feel free to do so. After your interview is transcribed, I will send a copy of the complete transcript to check for accuracy prior to the data analysis. You can read your responses and make any additions or deletions at this point.

Appendix B. Focus Group Interview Protocol for Pre-Service EFL Teachers

Interviewer: The researcher   Interview Code: _____

Pseudonym Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____   Time: _____Location: _____

I. Test the digital recorders.

II. Have the participants sign the consent form; give a copy to the participant.

III. Give a short introduction about the study

Thank you for participating in this focus group interview, which explores English pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). This interview aims to gather your perceptions on SEL, your practices in SEL, your training in SEL and your preparedness to implement SEL in English teaching.

Your participation is highly valued and there are no right or wrong answers. All comments, whether positive or negative, are appreciated and will contribute to my research. The interview will be digitally recorded and converted to text for data analysis. Your responses will remain confidential and used exclusively for this research.

The interview should take approximately two hours, but you have the right to pause, skip questions or end it at any time. If you have questions during the interview, feel free to ask. Before we start, we'll review and sign the consent form.

Afterward, you'll receive a transcript for accuracy verification and you can make additions or deletions. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? If not, may I begin recording now?

Thank you for your participation.

IV. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings, knowledge and experiences.

SECTION 1. PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

In the first section of the interview, I am going to ask you questions about your understanding about SEL. I will be asking you what you know about SEL – don't worry if you feel you don't know much – that is not a problem as I appreciate that it is new and not everyone has been involved yet.

Your Knowledge of Social and Emotional Learning

- How familiar are you with the term Social Emotional Learning (Học tập cảm xúc xã hội)?

- How would you define SEL in your own words?

- How would you define the terms of Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision Making?

- How familiar are you with the methods and strategies for integrating social emotional skills in English teaching activities? Can you provide examples of specific methods or strategies you know for teaching social and emotional skills to English students?
- If you have any knowledge of SEL, how was this knowledge developed?

Your Opinions about the Importance of SEL

These questions explore your opinions on the benefits of SEL in the English classroom:

- How would you define student success?
- Is it necessary to focus on the social and emotional dimensions of English learning and teaching?
- What is the importance of the social and emotional dimensions in the English classroom? How do you think they impact students' language learning and overall development?
- Some teachers prioritize academic outcomes over social and emotional skills. Do you think teachers should keep a balance between academic and social and emotional development objectives in English teaching? How can both be integrated effectively?
- What role do an English teacher play in fostering social-emotional skills for students?
- Do you think it is important to develop your Social and Emotional Competencies?
- What specific social and emotional skills do you think are most important for students in the context of English learning?
- What benefits do you see in integrating social and emotional dimensions into English learning and teaching?
- What is your opinion about the potential for the implementation of SEL in English classes at schools?

Your preparedness to implement SEL

- In your opinion, who should be responsible for the social emotional dimensions of teaching and learning and why? What role does the English teacher play in fostering students' social and emotional skills?
- To implement SEL in English teaching, what knowledge, skills and attitudes do you need?
- How would you incorporate SEL into your English lessons to create a more emotionally supportive and socially inclusive classroom environment? What strategies or activities do you use to promote SEL skills such as self-awareness, empathy and communication within your English lessons?
- Please talk about your future plans to implement SEL in your teaching jobs. What will you do to provide opportunities for your students to develop the competencies of self-awareness? self-management? social-awareness? relationship skills? responsible decision-making?

- How comfortable do you feel working with the social emotional dimensions in the English class? Are you interested in integrating SEL in your teaching approaches?

- How trained/ready/prepared do you feel for implementing SEL in your English teaching? Please elaborate why? Is it easy for you to implement SEL? Why or why not? How confident do you feel in your ability to implement SEL in your English teaching?

- What challenges might you face when implementing SEL in the English classroom and how do you plan to address these challenges to ensure the successful integration of SEL into your teaching?

- How would you assess SECs in your students? Can you describe specific assessment methods or tools you would use?

- How would you utilize assessment data related to students' social and emotional skills to inform your instruction?

- How have you prepared yourself to integrate SEL principles and practices into your English teaching? Can you describe any training, coursework or self-directed learning you've undertaken to become more proficient in this area?

- Would you like to improve your ability to teach SEL skills to students? How?Why?

SECTION 2. PRACTICES IN SEL

These next questions ask about your practices of SEL in your English learning and teaching process.

Your Practices of Social Emotional Competencies

- How do you practice social emotional competencies: self-awareness? self-management? social awareness? relationship skills? decision-making skills?

- At which level do you assess your Social Emotional Competencies: poor, average, good or excellent? Why? At which level do you assess your self-awareness? self-management? social awareness? relationship skills? responsible decision-making?

- What competencies do you feel are your strengths? What competencies, if at all, do you feel you should improve on?

Your Practices of SEL in English teaching

These questions aim to explore your practices of SEL in your English teaching practices or your competence to implement SEL in EFL teaching:

- Have you had any prior experience incorporating social emotional aspects into your English teaching practice? If so, can you share any success stories or lessons learned?

- What types of SEL activities or strategies have you used in English classrooms? Can you share some of the most effective methods for incorporating social emotional aspects into English teaching?

- How do you foster social-emotional skills for your students in the English classroom? How do you foster self-awareness? self-management? social awareness? relationship skills? responsible decision-making for your students?

- How do you assess and measure the growth of social-emotional skills in your English students? What tools or methods have you found most effective in evaluating their progress in these areas?

- In your English teaching experience, have you encountered any challenges when dealing with social emotional aspects in English teaching? How did you adapt your instructions to overcome these challenges?

- Do you have any future plans or ideas for further enhancing SEL practices in your English teaching?

SECTION 3. SEL INTEGRATION IN THE EFL TEACHER EDUCATION

In this section, we discuss the integration of SEL in the EFL teacher education curriculum.

Training in Social Emotional Competencies

First, we discuss how the English Teacher Education Curriculum fosters pre-service EFL teachers' Social Emotional Competencies.

- Are SECs such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision-making important for pre-service EFL teachers? Why or Why not?

- Do you think the English Teacher Education Curriculum provides opportunities for developing your SECs like self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making? If yes, how? Have they been ignored?

- What courses/subjects/activities provide opportunities for you to develop the competence of self-awareness? self-management? social awareness? relationship skills? responsible decision-making?

- How does the Curriculum assess and evaluate your SECs?

- What would you recommend your faculty/university do in order to foster pre-service EFL teachers' SECs?

Training SEL Instructional Competence

Next, we discuss how the Curriculum fosters your SEL Instructional Competence.

- Is it important to integrate SEL into EFL Teacher Education Curriculums? How important do you feel it is for pre-service EFL teachers to be prepared to implement SEL in English teaching?

- How has the Curriculum prepared you for addressing/integrating the social and emotional dimensions in your English teaching?

- Describe the components of the teacher education program (courses/subjects/activities/teacher trainers) that you believe can prepare you to implement SEL successfully in teaching? Follow-up: What specific components do you believe are most helpful in preparing you for your SEL implementation?

- Do you think the EFL teacher training curriculum at your college prepares you enough for your English teaching in terms of SEL?

- How does the Curriculum assess and evaluate your competence in integrating SEL into English teaching?

- Do you consider SEL a supplementary or a foundational component of the English teacher training program? Why?

- Do you think the English teacher training program should provide a specific SEL course for pre-service teachers? Why?

- Do you have any suggestions for the Curriculum to foster your competence to integrate SEL into English teaching?

- What do you think the future holds for SEL in the English teacher training curriculum?

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

We have been talking about SEL and SECs and SEL instructional competence and your preparedness to implement SEL in your ELT at school.

- Is there anything else about SEL that we haven't yet discussed that you would like to share? Please add any other comments you have concerning SEL.

VI. CLOSE THE INTERVIEW

Thank you very much for participating in the interview. I appreciate the time you took to complete the interview; you have been really helpful. If you have anything else to share, comment, provide feedback or ask, please feel free to do so. After your interview is transcribed, I will send a copy of the complete transcript to check for accuracy prior to the data analysis. You can read your responses and make any additions or deletions at this point.

Appendix C. Classroom Observation Sheet

EFL Teacher Trainer: _____Pre-service EFL teachers: _____
Course: _____Date & Time: _____

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SCORING DESCRIPTION

For each targeted social emotional competence, select the performance level that best reflects the evidence collected while observing the EFL teacher trainer (teacher trainers) and pre-service teachers (pre-service teachers).
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<tr>
<td>**1. Not Yet Present**</td>
<td>**2. Minimally Present**</td>
<td>**3. Moderately Present**</td>
<td>**4. Fully Present**</td>
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1. SEL practice **is not yet present** in the classroom. Neither the teacher trainer nor the pre-service teachers demonstrate any of the targeted social emotional competencies and skills.

2. SEL practice **is minimally present** in the classroom. The teacher trainer and pre-service teachers demonstrate some of the targeted SECs but only a small number of times throughout the lesson.

3. SEL practice **is moderately present** in the classroom. The teacher trainer and pre-service teachers demonstrate some of the behaviors associated with the targeted SECs but inconsistently so throughout the lesson.

4. SEL practice **is fully present** in the classroom. The teacher trainer and pre-service teachers demonstrate the behaviors associated with the targeted social emotional competence consistently across the lesson.
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EFL teacher trainers provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop SECs and SEL instructional competence
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Pre-service teachers demonstrated corresponding SECs and SEL instructional competence
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SELF-AWARENESS (SEA):

SEA1. identify and express their emotions, moods and feelings.
SEA2. recognise their personal interests and needs.
SEA3. assess their own strengths and limitations.
SEA4. explore their own personality and values.
SEA5. build a sense of self-confidence and optimism.
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<tr>
<td colspan="2">**Teacher Trainers' Practices:**</td>
<td colspan="2">**Pre-service teachers' Practices:**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2">**Score (1-4):**</td>
<td colspan="2">**Score (1-4):**</td>
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SELF-MANAGEMENT (SEM):

SEM1. adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations.
SEM2. set, adapt and evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life.
SEM3. embrace and overcome challenges in study & life.
SEM4. resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize my goals.
SEM5. take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks.
SEM6. manage their time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality (e.g., checklists, reminders).
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<tr>
<td colspan="2">**Teacher Trainers' Practices:**</td>
<td colspan="2">**Pre-service teachers' Practices:**</td>
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<td colspan="2">**Score (1-4):**</td>
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SOCIAL AWARENESS (SOA):

SOA1. understand how others feel & empathize with them.
SOA2. recognize other people's strengths & weaknesses.
SOA3. share their thoughts & points of view.
SOA4. respect others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints).
SOA5. appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities and differences.
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Teacher Trainers' Practices:	Pre-service teachers' Practices:
Score (1-4):	

<div style="background-color:#cde6b6">

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS (RES):
RES1. build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals.
RES2. identify the purpose, content, means and attitude required for effective communication.
RES3. work in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.
RES4. prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
RES5. seek or offer help and resources when needed.

</div>

Teacher Trainers' Practices:	Pre-service teachers' Practices:
Score (1-4):	

<div style="background-color:#cde6b6">

RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING (RDM):
RDM1. identify and clarify information from various sources to assess the reliability of new ideas.
RDM2. consider a variety of factors when making decisions.
RDM3. gather relevant information, propose and analyze various solutions and select the most suitable one for problem-solving.
RDM.4. think creatively and adapt solutions to changing contexts.
RDM5. anticipate and evaluate the consequences of their words and actions.

</div>

Teacher Trainers' Practices:	Pre-service teachers' Practices:
Score (1-4):	

<div style="background-color:#cde6b6">

SEL INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCE :
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy in EFL teaching
SELIC 2. Apply knowledge of SEL concepts and principles in EFL teaching
SELIC 3. Model good social emotional competencies in EFL teaching
SELIC 4. Design and organize activities to foster SECs for students in EFL teaching
SELIC 5. Assess students' SECs

</div>

Teacher Trainers' Practices:	Pre-service teachers' Practices:
Score (1-4):	
OVERALL SCORE (1-4)	

Appendix D. Survey Questionnaire for Pre-service EFL Teachers

PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Dear students,

First of all, I would like to thank you in advance for the time you are willing to devote to fill out this questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to explore your perceptions and practices of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). In addition, the questionnaire aims to explore how the teacher education program at your university equips you with SECs (social emotional competencies) and SEL instructional competence.

This is not a test; there are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is the main consideration. Please, express your opinions freely, honestly and to the best of your ability. The response could be either putting a tick mark in the box or just giving the possible responses in written form on the space provided corresponding to each question item.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. Your identity and individual responses will be kept strictly confidential as your information will be coded and will remain confidential. The results of the questionnaire will be used only for research purposes. Only the combined results from the study as a whole will be analysed and reported. No individual information will be released to any person or department except at your written request and on your authorisation.

I thank you in advance for your participation and cooperation.

PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Write your FULL NAME/NICKNAME here: _____

2. Write your EMAIL here: _____

3. Write your PHONE NUMBER here: _____

4. Select your GENDER: ☐Male   ☐Female   ☐Other

5. Select the total number of years you have been in the EFL teacher training program.

☐Year 1   ☐Year 2   ☐Year 3   ☐Year 4   ☐Year 5   ☐Year 6

6. What experience do you have related to teaching English?

☐English tutor (Gia sư)   ☐Teaching Practicum (Thực tập sư phạm)
☐Teaching assistant at educational centers (Trợ giảng)   ☐Professional Fieldtrips (Thực tế chuyên môn)
☐Teaching practices at university (Thực hành sư phạm)   ☐Others

7. How knowledgeable are you about Social Emotional Learning?

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

SEL Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
7.1. I know the concept of Social Emotional Learning (SEL).	□	□	□	□	□
7.2. I can define and differentiate the key competencies associated with SEL such as Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills and Responsible decision-making.	□	□	□	□	□
7.3. I can explain the concepts related to SEL to other people.	□	□	□	□	□
7.4. I know the core principles and goals of SEL.	□	□	□	□	□
7.5. I know various methods, strategies and practices for effectively incorporating SEL principles into my EFL teaching practices.	□	□	□	□	□
7.6. I know methods and tools for assessing students' social and emotional development in the EFL classroom.	□	□	□	□	□

8. Choose the best definition of Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

□A. Learning is based on emotions and communication with others. It only focuses on emotional factors and relationships in the classroom.

□B. SEL is similar to life skills education, aimed at equipping students with essential skills needed for effective functioning and coping in everyday life. It also involves the abilities to apply their learning in real-life situations.

□C. The process of acquiring and effectively applying knowledge, attitudes and skills for understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, showing empathy, maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions.

□D. SEL focuses on learners' emotions in learning and examines whether the learning can be applied and contribute to society. Additionally, SEL considers the influence of the surrounding environment on learning.

9. Do EFL teachers need to develop social emotional competencies for students?

1. Important 2. Not Very Important 3. Important 4. Very Important 5. Extremely Important

	1	2	3	4	5
9.1. Self-Awareness: Recognize and understand one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses and self-identity.	□	□	□	□	□
9.2. Self-Management: Regulate emotions, control impulses, manage stress and set and achieve goals.	□	□	□	□	□
9.3. Social Awareness: Recognize and understand the emotions and perspectives of others and show empathy.	□	□	□	□	□
9.4. Relationship Skills: Build and maintain positive relationships, effective communication, conflict resolution and teamwork.	□	□	□	□	□
9.5. Responsible Decision-Making: Make ethical and informed choices, consider consequences and solve problems constructively.	□	□	□	□	□

10. What are the benefits of SEL in the English classroom?

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

SEL Benefits	1	2	3	4	5
10.1.Increased self-awareness and goal-setting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.2.Promoted mental health and well-being.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.3. Fostering student strengths and minimizing weaknesses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.4. Better adaptation to and integration into the surrounding environments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.5.Reduced stress and anxiety for both teachers and students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.6.Reduced behavioral issues and conflicts in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.7. Accelerated learning and teaching processes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.8.Improved positive classroom atmosphere and teacher-student relationships.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.9.Improved student engagement and academic performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.1. Real-life applications and career preparedness.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.11. Enhanced determination & perseverance for professional development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. How did you learn about SEL?

☐Course lectures   ☐Books   ☐Online courses
☐Assignments/projects/coursework ☐Journals ☐Mentorship programs
☐Research experience   ☐Internet   ☐Other sources
☐Student teaching practice ☐Seminars/Workshops/Conferences

PART III. PRACTICES IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

12-16. Now think about your social emotional competencies. Choose the score that holds true for you.

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

12. Self-Awareness (SeA)	1	2	3	4	5
12.1. I can identify and express my emotions, moods and feelings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.2. I can recognise my personal interests and needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.3. I can recognize my own strengths and limitations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.4. I can identify my own personality and values.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.5. I can maintain a sense of self-confidence and optimism.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Self-Management (SeM)	1	2	3	4	5
13.1. I can adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.2. I can set, adapt & evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.3. I can embrace and overcome challenges in study & life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.4. I can resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize my goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.5. I can take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.6. I can effectively manage time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Social-Awareness (SoA)	1	2	3	4	5
14.1. I can understand how others feel and empathize with them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14.2. I can recognize other people's strengths and weaknesses.	□	□	□	□	□
14.3. I can understand other perspectives.	□	□	□	□	□
14.4. I respect others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints).	□	□	□	□	□
14.5. I appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities & differences.	□	□	□	□	□
15. Relationship Skills (ReS)	1	2	3	4	5
15.1. I can build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals.	□	□	□	□	□
15.2. I can identify the purpose, content, means and attitude required for effective communication.	□	□	□	□	□
15.3. I can work and learn well in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.	□	□	□	□	□
15.4. I can prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways	□	□	□	□	□
15.5. I can seek or offer help and resources when needed.	□	□	□	□	□
16. Responsible Decision-Making (RdM)	1	2	3	4	5
16.1. I can identify and clarify information from various sources to assess the trends and reliability of new ideas.	□	□	□	□	□
16.2. When making decisions, I consider a variety of factors.	□	□	□	□	□
16.3. I can gather relevant information, propose and analyze various solutions and select the most suitable one for problem-solving.	□	□	□	□	□
16.4. I can think creatively, create new elements from different ideas and adapt solutions to changing contexts.	□	□	□	□	□
16.5. I anticipate and evaluate the consequences of my words and actions.	□	□	□	□	□

PART IV. PRACTICES IN SEL INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCE

17-22. How often do you foster SECs for your students?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4.Often   5. Always

17. How often do you foster Self-Awareness for your students? *- I provide opportunities for my students to …*	1	2	3	4	5
17.1. identify and express their emotions, moods and feelings.	□	□	□	□	□
17.2. recognise their personal interests and needs.	□	□	□	□	□
17.3. assess their own strengths and limitations.	□	□	□	□	□
17.4. explore their own personality and values.	□	□	□	□	□
17.5. build a sense of self-confidence and optimism	□	□	□	□	□
18. How often do you foster Self-Management for your students? *- I provide opportunities for my students to …*	1	2	3	4	5
18.1. adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations.	□	□	□	□	□
18.2. set, adapt and evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life.	□	□	□	□	□
18.3. embrace and overcome challenges in study & life.	□	□	□	□	□
18.4. resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize my goals.	□	□	□	□	□
18.5. take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks.	□	□	□	□	□
18.6. help them manage their time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality (e.g., checklists, reminders).	□	□	□	□	□
19. How often do you foster Social Awareness for your students? *- I provide opportunities for my students to …*	1	2	3	4	5
19.1. understand how others feel & empathize with them.	□	□	□	□	□

	1	2	3	4	5
19.2. recognize other people's strengths & weaknesses.	□	□	□	□	□
19.3. share their thoughts & points of view.	□	□	□	□	□
19.4. respect others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints).	□	□	□	□	□
19.5. appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities and differences.	□	□	□	□	□
20. How often do you foster Relationship Skills for your students? *- I provide opportunities for my students to …*	1	2	3	4	5
20.1. build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals.	□	□	□	□	□
20.2. identify the purpose, content, means & attitude required for effective communication.	□	□	□	□	□
20.3. work in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.	□	□	□	□	□
20.4. prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.	□	□	□	□	□
20.5. seek or offer help and resources when needed.	□	□	□	□	□
21. How often do you foster Responsible Decision Making for your students? *- I provide opportunities for my students to …*	1	2	3	4	5
21.1. identify and clarify information from various sources to assess the trends and reliability of new ideas.	□	□	□	□	□
21.2. consider a variety of factors when making decisions.	□	□	□	□	□
21.3. gather relevant information, propose and analyze various solutions and select the most suitable one for problem-solving..	□	□	□	□	□
21..4. think creatively, create new elements from different ideas and adapt solutions to changing contexts.	□	□	□	□	□
21.5. anticipate and evaluate the consequences of their words and actions.	□	□	□	□	□
22. How often do you promote SEL in your EFL classroom?	1	2	3	4	5
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology such as psychological and cognitive development theories in EFL teaching to support student social, emotional and academic development.	□	□	□	□	□
SELIC 2. Use SEL-related concepts such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making explicitly to address social and emotional issues in teaching practices.	□	□	□	□	□
SELIC 3. Demonstrate and model social emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.	□	□	□	□	□
SELIC 4. Design and organize activities such as role-playing, group discussion, reflective writing, learning projects, for students to develop and practice SEL skills in authentic EFL teaching contexts.	□	□	□	□	□
SELIC 5. Use appropriate tools and methods to assess students' social and emotional development.	□	□	□	□	□

PART V. TRAINING IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

23-27. How does the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum foster each of the five core Social Emotional Competencies (SECs) for you?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4.Often   5. Always

23. How often does the Curriculum foster Self-Awareness for you? *- The curriculum provides opportunities for me to …*	1	2	3	4	5
23.1. identify and express my emotions, moods and feelings.	□	□	□	□	□
23.2. recognise my personal interests and needs.	□	□	□	□	□
23.3. to assess my own strengths and limitations.	□	□	□	□	□
23.4. explore my own personality and values.	□	□	□	□	□
23.5. develop a sense of self-confidence and optimism.	□	□	□	□	□

24. How often does the Curriculum foster Self-Management for you? - *The curriculum provides opportunities for me to …*	1	2	3	4	5
24.1. adapt thinking, behaviors and emotional responses to new situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.2. set, adapt and evaluate specific goals to achieve success in study & life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.3. embrace and overcome challenges in study & life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.4. resist inappropriate social behaviors & activities to realize my goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.5. take initiative and actively engage in studies and life tasks.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.6. effectively manage time to fulfill tasks on time with high quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25. How often does the Curriculum foster Social Awareness for you? - *The curriculum provides opportunities for me to …*	1	2	3	4	5
25.1. understand how others feel and empathize with them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25.2. recognize other people's strengths and weaknesses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25.3. understand other points of view and perspectives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25.4. respect others (e.g., listen attentively and respect their viewpoints).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25.5. appreciate diversity and recognize individual similarities and differences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26. How often does the Curriculum foster Relationship Skills for you? - *The curriculum provides opportunities for me to …*	1	2	3	4	5
26.1. build and maintain relationships with diverse groups and individuals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26.2. identify the purpose, content, means and attitude required for effective communication.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26.3. work in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26.4. prevent, manage & resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26.5. seek or offer help and resources when needed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27. How often does the Curriculum foster Responsible Decision Making for you? - *The curriculum provides opportunities for me to …*	1	2	3	4	5
27.1. identify and clarify information from various sources to assess the trends and reliability of new ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27.2. consider a variety of factors when making decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27.3. gather relevant information, propose and analyze various solutions and select the most suitable one for problem-solving.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27.4. think creatively, create new elements from different ideas and adapt solutions to changing contexts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27.5. anticipate and evaluate the consequences of my words and actions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

28. How important do you think it is to foster Social Emotional Competencies for pre-service EFL teacher?

1. Important 2. Not very Important 3. Important 4. Very Important 5. Extremely Important

Social Emotional Competencies	1	2	3	4	5
28.1.Self-Awareness: Recognize and understand one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses and self-identity.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28.2.Self-Management: Regulate emotions, control impulses, manage stress and set and achieve goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28.3.Social Awareness: Recognize and understand the emotions and perspectives of others and show empathy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28.4.Relationship Skills: Build and maintain positive relationships, effective communication, conflict resolution and teamwork.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28.5.Responsible Decision-Making: Make ethical and informed choices, consider consequences and solve problems constructively.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PART VI. TRAINING IN SEL INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCE

29. How does the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum at your university foster your Competence to Implement Social Emotional Learning in your EFL teaching?

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

The EFL Teacher Education Curriculum trains me how to ….	1	2	3	4	5
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology such as psychological and cognitive development theories in EFL teaching to support student social, emotional and academic development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 2. Use SEL-related concepts such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making explicitly to address social and emotional issues in teaching practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 3. Demonstrate and model social emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 4. Design and organize activities such as role-playing, group discussion, reflective writing, learning projects, for students to develop and practice SEL skills in authentic EFL teaching contexts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 5. Use appropriate tools and methods to assess students' social and emotional development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

30. How important do you feel it is for pre-service EFL teachers to be trained on how to implement SEL in the English classroom?

☐Not important ☐Not very important ☐Important ☐Very important ☐Extremely important

PART VII. PREPAREDNESS TO IMPLEMENT SEL IN TEACHING

31. How prepared do you feel for implementing SEL in your English teaching?

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

I feel prepared to …	1	2	3	4	5
SELIC 1. Apply knowledge of psychology such as psychological and cognitive development theories in EFL teaching to support student social, emotional and academic development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 2. Use SEL-related concepts such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making explicitly to address social and emotional issues in teaching practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 3. Demonstrate and model social emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 4. Design and organize activities such as role-playing, group discussion, reflective writing, learning projects for students to develop and practice SEL skills in authentic EFL teaching contexts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SELIC 5. Use appropriate tools and methods to assess students' social and emotional development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

32. What are the barriers to the implementation of SEL in your English classroom?

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Barriers to SEL Implementation	1	2	3	4	5
37.1. Limited knowledge or understanding of SEL concepts and strategies.	□	□	□	□	□
37.2. Lack of training and professional development in SEL practices.	□	□	□	□	□
37.3. Difficulty in balancing time for social, emotional & academic requirements.	□	□	□	□	□
37.4. Insufficient access to appropriate SEL resources and materials.	□	□	□	□	□
37.5. Difficulty in engaging introverted students in social emotional activities.	□	□	□	□	□
37.6. Insufficient human and financial resources	□	□	□	□	□
37.7. Insufficient mastery of the five core SECs among some teachers.	□	□	□	□	□
37.8. Resistance from teachers to new teaching methods or extra responsibilities	□	□	□	□	□
37.9. Lack of support from the broader educational system to implement SEL.	□	□	□	□	□
37.1. Challenges in managing large class sizes	□	□	□	□	□

CLOSING

That's the end of the survey. Thank you very much. Your response is very important to us. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at yentt@tnue.edu.vn.

Thank you again for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

1. ELEMENTS OF SEL IN 2018 GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM	1
1.1 Views of curriculum design	1
1.2 Curriculum Objectives	1
1.3 Educational Contents	1
1.4 Teaching methods	1
1.5 Assessment	1
1.6 Performance objectives of General Competencies	1
1.6.1 RDM	8
1.6.2 RES	8
1.6.3 SOA	4
1.6.4 SEM	12
1.6.5 SEA	3
2. SEL ELEMENTS IN VPU's EFL TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM	1
2.1 Goals of the EFL teacher education curriculum	1
2.2 EFL teacher trainers' perceptions of SEL	2
2.2.1 Knowledge of SEL	16
2.2.2 Relevance and benefits of SEL in EFL teaching and learning	38
2.2.3 The need to develop SECs and SEL instructional competence for pre-service EFL teachers	64
2.2.4 Approach to SEL implementation	36
2.2.5 Perceived Barriers and solutions	20
2.3 Pre-service EFL teachers' training in five core SECs	48
2.3.1 SEA	29
2.3.2 SEM	97
2.3.3 SOA	47
2.3.4 RES	85
2.3.5 RDM	50
2.4 Pre-service EFL teachers' training in SEL instructional competence	16
2.4.1 Apply Knowledge of Psychology, Pedagogy	60
2.4.2 Apply Knowledge of SEL	3
2.4.3 Practice of SECs in EFL teaching	48
2.4.4 Design & organize activities to foster SECs for students	32
2.4.5 Assess students' SECs	3
3. EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SEL	0
3.1 Knowledge of SEL	1
3.1.1 Definition of SEL	10

3.1.2 Definition of five core SECs	20
3.1.3 Familiarity with SEL	4
3.2 Priority and Correlation between SECs	9
3.3 Perceived benefits of SEL	19
3.4 Perceived roles of EFL teacher in promoting SEL	12
4. EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER'S PRACTICES OF SEL	0
4.1 Demonstrate the five core SECs in the learning process	21
4.1.1 SEA	6
4.1.2 SEM	16
4.1.3 SOA	13
4.1.4 RES	20
4.1.5 RDM	23
4.2 Demonstrate SEL instructional competence in EFL teaching practices	1
4.2.1 Apply knowledge of psychology and pedagogy	1
4.2.2 Apply knowledge of SEL principles	8
4.2.3 Model good social emotional competencies	6
4.2.4 Design & organize activities to foster SECs for students	1
4.2.5 Assess students' social and emotional development	1
5. EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS TO IMPLEMENT SEL IN EFL TEACHING	3
5.1 Prepared to practice SEL instructional competence in EFL teaching practices	3
5.1.1 Apply knowledge of Psychology and Pedagogy	5
5.1.2 Apply knowledge of SEL principles	0
5.1.3 Model Good Social emotional Competencies	2
5.1.4 Organize activities to foster SECs for students	9
5.1.5 Assess students' SECs	0
5.2 Confidence, Commitment, Comfort	1
5.3 Perceived barriers	3
5.4 Recommendation and Support needs	20

Appendix F. Letter of Approval from the Teacher Training Institution

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED

Title of the Research: Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Social and Emotional Learning: An Exploratory Study at a Pedagogical University in Vietnam

Researcher: Tran Thi Yen   **Affiliation:** [redacted] University of Education

Email Address: yentt@tnue.edu.vn   **Phone Number:** 0979697224

I, [redacted] in my capacity as the Vice Rector of [redacted] University of Education, have received and reviewed the research proposal titled "Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Social and Emotional Learning: An Exploratory Study at a Pedagogical University in Vietnam" submitted by Tran Thi Yen, affiliated with Thai Nguyen University of Education.

I hereby grant permission for the aforementioned research to be conducted at [redacted] University of Education. I understand the aims and objectives of the research, as well as the methods that will be employed, including document analysis, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus-group interviews, and a survey questionnaire.

I acknowledge that the research aims to explore the perceptions and practices of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) among pre-service EFL teachers and teacher trainers at the Faculty [redacted] University of Education. I recognize the potential benefits of the study in enhancing the quality of EFL teacher education and its contribution to curriculum development, teaching strategies, and professional development initiatives.

I understand that confidentiality is a top priority throughout all phases of this research. I acknowledge that all data collected, including documents, observations, and interview responses, will be handled with the utmost care and stored securely. I am aware that personal identifiers will be anonymized, and any information that could potentially reveal the identity of participants or the institution will be kept strictly confidential. I acknowledge that the research findings will be presented in aggregate form to ensure the anonymity of individuals and the institution.

I assure the researcher, Tran Thi Yen, that the university will provide the necessary support to facilitate access to relevant documents and participants, and I agree to cooperate with her to ensure the successful completion of this research.

This consent is granted voluntarily, and I understand that I have the right to withdraw this consent at any time without any adverse consequences. I also understand that Tran Thi Yen is available to provide any additional information or address any concerns regarding this research proposal.

Vice Rector's

Signature:_____   Date:__26 /12 / 2023__

Appendix G. Informed Consent Forms

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of social and emotional learning: An exploratory study at a pedagogical university in Vietnam

Investigator: Tran Thi Yen   **Affiliation:** ⬛⬛⬛ iversity of Education

Email Address: yentt@tnue.edu.vn   **Phone Number:** 0979697224

Introduction:

Thank you for considering participating in this semi-structured interview. This research aims to investigate the perspectives and practices related to SEL and the readiness of EFL pre-service teachers to implement SEL in their future teaching.

Purpose of the Interview:

The purpose of this interview is to gather insights into your perceptions of social emotional learning and how you incorporate it into your EFL teacher training programs. The information obtained will contribute to understanding the development of Social Emotional Competencies (SECs) and SEL instructional competences among EFL pre-service teachers.

Confidentiality:

Your participation is voluntary, and all information provided during the interview will be treated with strict confidentiality. The recorded data will be used exclusively for this research project. Your name and any identifying information will be kept confidential, and the data will be stored securely.

Rights of Participants:

You have the right to pause, skip questions, or end the interview at any time. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask. After the interview, you will receive a transcript for your review. At that time, you can make any additions or deletions to ensure accuracy.

Consent:

I, the undersigned, have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this semi-structured interview for the research study titled " Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of social and emotional learning: An exploratory study at a pedagogical university in Vietnam." I understand that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty.

Participant's Name: ⬛⬛⬛

Participant's Signature: ⬛⬛⬛   Date: _27/12/2023_

Researcher's Certification:

I, the researcher, have explained the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study to the participant. I am committed to ensuring confidentiality and will provide the participant with a copy of the interview transcript for review.

Researcher's Name: _Trần Thị Yến_

Researcher's Signature: _un_   Date: _27/12/2023_

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the investigator at the provided contact information.

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of social and emotional learning: An exploratory study at a pedagogical university in Vietnam

Investigator: Tran Thi Yen   **Affiliation:**   niversity of Education

Email Address: yentt@tnue.edu.vn   **Phone Number:** 0979697224

Introduction:

Thank you for considering participation in this focus group interview. The purpose of this study is to investigate EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Purpose of the Interview:

The interview will focus on gathering insights into your understanding of social emotional learning, your application of SEL in EFL learning, your training in SEL, and your preparedness to implement SEL in future EFL teaching at schools.

Confidentiality:

Your participation is voluntary, and all information provided during the interview will be treated with strict confidentiality. The recorded data will be used exclusively for this research project. Your name and any identifying information will be kept confidential, and the data will be stored securely.

Rights of Participants:

You have the right to pause, skip questions, or end the interview at any time. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask. After the interview, you will receive a transcript for your review. At that time, you can make any additions or deletions to ensure accuracy.

Consent:

I, the undersigned, have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group interview for the research study titled "Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of social and emotional learning: An exploratory study at a pedagogical university in Vietnam." I understand that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: __11/01/2024__

Researcher's Certification:

I, the researcher, have explained the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study to the participant. I am committed to ensuring confidentiality and will provide the participant with a copy of the interview transcript for review.

Researcher's Name: _____Trần Thị Yến_____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: __12/1/2024__

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the investigator at the provided contact information.

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LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS
RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

Tran, T. Y. (2023). Social Emotional Learning as a promising pedagogy in the English language classroom. In *International Graduate Research Symposium* (pp. 375-387). Vietnam National University Press. ISBN 978-604-384-831-1.

Tran, T. Y., Nguyen, T. M. H., & Huynh, A. T. (2024). Exploring the social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 40*(1), 166-187. https://doi.org/10.63023/2525-2445/jfs.ulis.5185

Tran, T. Y. (2024) A Book Review on Research Methods in Education (8th edition). *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*: Vol. 25: Iss. 2. https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1377

Tran, T. Y. (2024). Integrating Social Emotional Learning into EFL Teacher Education: A Pathway to Holistic Student Development. In *2024 International Graduate Research Symposium* (pp. 119-130). Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi. ISBN 978-604-384-831-1.

Tran, T. Y. (2025). Assessing Social Emotional Learning Instructional Competence among Pre-service EFL teachers at a Vietnamese Pedagogical University. *European Journal of English Language Studies*, *5*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.12973/ejels.5.1.1

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Tran, T. Y. (2025). Integrating Social Emotional Learning into English Teacher Education for the Digital Era: Rationale and Pathways. In *Proceedings of the International Conference "Language Teaching and Research in the Digital Era: Integration and Development"* (pp. 708-721). Vietnam Maritime University Press. ISBN 978-604-937-421-0.

Tran, T. Y. & Nguyen, T. M. H. (2025). Understanding Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perspectives on Social Emotional Learning: Implications for Optimizing Implementation in Vietnamese Teacher Education. In *Book of Abstracts of the 4th International Conference on Innovation in Learning Instruction and Teacher Education* (p. 65). Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam).

Tran, T. Y. (2025). Advocating for Social-Emotional Learning in EFL Teacher Education: Exploring Beliefs, Practices and Strategies of Teacher Educators in Vietnam. *International Journal of TESOL & Education.* Accepted.

Tran, T. Y., Nguyen, T. M. H., & Huynh, A. T. (2025). Assessing Social Emotional Learning Competencies of EFL Pre-service Teachers at a Pedagogical University in Vietnam. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*. Under review.

Nguyen, T. M. H & Tran, T. Y. (2025). Constructing a framework of social-emotional competences for pre-service English teachers in a Vietnamese pedagogical university [University-level research project, University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi].