

## **THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SPEAKING ENGLISH**

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Emotions play a crucial role in how people acquire a foreign language. Many learners experience tension, nervousness, or even fear when they are required to speak a language they do not yet master. This reaction is commonly referred to as foreign language anxiety and most often emerges during speaking activities, oral presentations, or whole-class discussions. Foreign language anxiety has been described as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning...” [3, p. 128]. When these feelings become too intense, learners may withdraw from tasks and avoid expressing their ideas in English.

Closely connected to this is the fear of negative evaluation. Students may be worried about making errors, being corrected in front of peers, or sounding inappropriate or “incorrect.” Such concerns reduce their willingness to speak and limit opportunities for practice. Research further shows that anxiety can interfere with essential cognitive functions, including attention and memory, because “anxiety can interfere with the cognitive processing of language input” [4, p. 301]. As a result, more and more teachers aim to create emotionally secure and supportive classrooms.

One effective approach to addressing these emotional challenges is social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL emphasizes the development of skills such as recognizing and understanding one’s own emotions, regulating feelings, demonstrating empathy, and collaborating with others. These competences enable students to identify what they are experiencing and to react more constructively in stressful situations. As CASEL (2020) points out, “at the center are the five core social and emotional competencies –

broad, interrelated areas that support learning and development. Circling them are four key settings where students live and grow”[1]. In this way, SEL provides a framework for supporting both academic and emotional development.

In the English language classroom, SEL contributes to a positive learning climate in which learners feel safer to speak and share opinions. The teacher plays a central role in establishing such conditions. Teachers influence not only the content and methods of instruction but also the emotional climate of the classroom. Scholars underline how critical it is to cultivate a supportive environment. For example, “learning about their students’ previous school experiences, ages, interests, and cultures can help teachers establish the big picture while helping with rapport,” which in turn helps create a more welcoming, non-judgemental atmosphere [5, p. 1].

In everyday practice, SEL principles can be integrated into English lessons through relatively simple techniques. Pair and small-group work, for instance, provides students with opportunities to speak in less threatening situations. Rather than responding immediately in front of the entire class, learners can first explain their ideas to a partner. This additional planning time reduces the pressure of public performance. The Think-Pair-Share strategy is another gradual way of involving students. Learners begin by reflecting individually on a question, then share their ideas with a partner, and finally some pairs present their responses to the class. Having already rehearsed what they want to say, many students feel more confident during whole-class sharing.

Brief reflective activities can also support students’ emotional awareness. At the beginning or end of a lesson, they can be invited to write or talk for a minute about how they feel about their progress or current difficulties in English. These short “emotion check-ins” encourage students to notice their emotional reactions and to start developing their own ways of managing anxiety. During school teaching practice, such tasks were implemented as one- to two-minute written reflections. Younger learners, such as sixth graders, generally reacted positively and engaged actively, whereas some older students (e.g., ninth graders) initially showed less interest and perceived the task as overly simple. Nevertheless, even partial engagement promoted reflection and gradually fostered greater awareness of their learning processes.

Another helpful tool is the use of learning journals. Students can regularly write about their experiences in English lessons, noting challenges, achievements, and future goals. This ongoing reflection enables them to track their progress over time and to reinterpret mistakes as natural and

constructive elements of language learning rather than as signs of failure. Journals can also provide teachers with valuable insights into learners' emotions and needs, helping them tailor support more effectively.

The physical organization of the classroom is also significant, particularly the seating arrangement. During the teaching practicum described here, the classroom was first arranged in a hybrid format combining a horseshoe layout with a round table in the middle. Initially, students tended to avoid the central table and preferred seats further away from the teacher's desk. After encouraging them to sit around the round table and by the teacher moving physically closer to them, noticeable changes were observed. Learners became more engaged, participated more actively in tasks, and required less behavioural management, including fewer reminders about mobile phone use. These observations suggest that closer physical proximity and more collaborative seating patterns can positively affect motivation and participation.

Constructive feedback is another key factor in lowering classroom anxiety. When teachers emphasize effort, progress, and specific strategies for improvement instead of focusing solely on errors, students are more likely to interpret difficulties as opportunities to learn. This approach aligns with the notion of a growth mindset, which proposes that abilities can be developed through sustained effort and practice [2]. Students who adopt a growth mindset are generally more willing to take risks in communication, experiment with new language forms, and persist despite setbacks.

Additional SEL-oriented practices can further enhance this supportive environment. For example, establishing clear and predictable classroom routines can reduce uncertainty, which often contributes to anxiety. Collaborative rule-setting, where students help define class norms, can foster a sense of ownership and mutual respect. Regular class discussions about emotions—such as naming common feelings during group work or tests—can normalize emotional experiences and show learners that anxiety is shared and manageable. Role-plays and drama activities that focus on empathy and perspective-taking can also help students understand others' feelings while simultaneously practicing language in a low-stakes, creative context.

Peer support structures, such as buddy systems or small “learning communities,” can additionally strengthen both emotional and academic outcomes. When students know they can rely on peers for help, correction does not feel as threatening, and they may be more inclined to ask questions or admit confusion. Over time, this sense of belonging can reduce the fear of negative evaluation and encourage more spontaneous use of English.

Taken together, incorporating social-emotional learning into English language teaching creates a classroom climate that promotes participation and reduces anxiety. Activities that foster cooperation, reflection, and emotional awareness help learners feel more secure and confident when using English. Such conditions support not only students' emotional well-being, but also the development of their communicative competence, leading to more meaningful and sustained engagement with the language.

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