

Effective Social-emotional Learning Strategies in the Online University Classroom

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Abstract

With the increasing prevalence of online education, especially since the pandemic, there is a growing need to explore effective strategies for fostering social-emotional learning (SEL) in virtual university classrooms. The key components of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The researchers explore effective SEL strategies in online university classrooms. Research widely reports on the topic of SEL programs in K-12 settings, yet few have focused on SEL strategies in adult-level or university settings, specifically for online environments. This qualitative, phenomenological study investigates professor perceptions regarding effective SEL strategies in university online environments. Participants in the study are professors with experience teaching at the graduate or undergraduate level in a private university in Tennessee. The project collects data from a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group discussion. Several strategies emerge as effective in promoting SEL, including sympathy building, supportive environment, and building connections. By implementing these strategies, educators can effectively promote SEL in online university classrooms, thereby enhancing the overall well-being of students, academic success, and readiness for the online environment. However, further research is warranted on the implementation of these strategies in diverse online learning environments.

Keywords: Social-emotional learning (SEL), strategies, online, university classrooms

1. Introduction

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has become crucial in university classrooms, extending beyond traditional academic instruction. SEL involves regulating emotions, setting goals, demonstrating empathy, building relationships, and making constructive choices (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2019). The roots of SEL go back to Plato's Republic, which emphasized a comprehensive educational approach including physical education, the arts, mathematics, science, character development, and moral judgment (Edutopia, 2011). Modern SEL has been significantly influenced by psychologists such as Daniel Goleman and Howard Gardner, and education theorists like John Dewey, who advocated holistic education addressing cognitive, social, and emotional learning aspects (Brackett, 2013; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010).

Despite the growing importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), there is a lack of research focusing on its implementation in online university classrooms, which has become critical due to the rise of remote learning (Saleh, 2017; Warsame & Valles, 2018). The shift to remote education has brought about unique challenges in fostering a supportive and emotionally healthy learning environment. Online learning environments often lack the direct interpersonal interactions that are fundamental to traditional SEL practices, making it imperative to explore new strategies and tools that can effectively support SEL in a virtual setting.

In this study, the researchers aim to identify effective SEL strategies for online university classrooms to enhance student well-being and holistic development, thereby filling a significant gap in current educational research (McClam-Hollimon, 2022; Todd et al., 2022). By focusing on practical and evidence-based methods, the study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data from both students and instructors. The study is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the broaden-and-build hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and positive emotions in learning (Fredrickson,

2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that social interactions are fundamental to cognitive development, suggesting that learning is inherently a social process where knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative activities and dialogue. This theory underscores the significance of creating interactive and engaging online environments where students can connect, communicate, and collaborate, thereby enhancing their cognitive and emotional growth.

1.1 Research Question

In this study, the researchers aim to identify effective Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for online university classrooms to enhance student well-being and holistic development, thereby filling a significant gap in current educational research (McClam-Hollimon, 2022; Todd et al., 2022). With the increasing prevalence of online learning, understanding how to effectively integrate SEL into virtual classrooms is crucial for student success (Paolini, 2020). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that social interactions are essential for cognitive development. In the context of online university classrooms, this theory underscores the importance of creating opportunities for students to interact meaningfully with their peers and instructors. Fredrickson's broaden-and-build hypothesis suggests that positive emotions expand individuals' thought-action repertoires and build lasting personal resources. In online university settings, fostering positive emotions can enhance student engagement and well-being.

The researchers acknowledge their position as an advocate for SEL and an educator, which may influence their perspective and interpretation of findings. This positionality is crucial to consider, as it can shape the research process and the conclusions drawn. This study is limited to online university classrooms and may not be generalizable to all educational settings. While the focus on online university environments provides valuable insights into SEL strategies tailored for remote learning, several factors must be considered when interpreting the findings: context-specific variables, technology access, diverse environments, instructor training, student diversity and so on.

1.2 Assumptions

The researchers assume that participants will provide honest and accurate responses regarding their experiences with SEL strategies.

1.3 Definition of Terms

(1) Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing critical skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2019). These competencies are essential for personal development and effective interpersonal interactions.

(2) Self-awareness involves recognizing one's emotions and values. It is about understanding what drives you and how your feelings influence your behavior (Mayer et al., 2004). This awareness is the foundation for personal growth and emotional intelligence.

(3) Self-management is the ability to regulate your emotions and behaviors in different situations (Weissberg, 2016). It includes managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself to achieve goals, which are crucial for maintaining personal and professional balance.

(4) Social awareness is the capacity to understand and empathize with others (Weissberg, 2016). This skill involves being aware of social norms and recognizing the emotions and perspectives of those around you, fostering a sense of community and cooperation.

(5) Emotion recognition and regulation are about identifying and managing your emotions effectively (Weissberg, 2016). This competency helps in understanding how emotions influence thoughts and actions, enabling better decision-making and emotional health.

(6) Empathy building focuses on developing the ability to understand and share the feelings of others (Weissberg, 2016). Empathy is vital for building strong relationships and creating a supportive and inclusive environment.

(7) Conflict resolution and problem-solving are essential skills for addressing disagreements constructively (Weissberg, 2016). These skills help in navigating conflicts by finding mutually beneficial solutions and maintaining positive relationships.

(8) Self-regulated learning involves managing one's learning processes effectively (Weissberg, 2016). It includes setting goals, monitoring progress, and reflecting on outcomes, which are critical for lifelong learning and personal achievement.

1.4 Summary

In this qualitative study the researchers sought the perceptions of professors regarding SEL experiences in the university classroom. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build hypothesis served as the theoretical framework for this

study. Positive emotions can help students handle challenges. According to Eleanor (2019), teaching positive emotions is like building a strong root of the plant, and the educator is the gardener. The roots and trunks support the plant, just as the positive thinking pattern supports individuals in the challenge.

2. Literature Review

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the significance of SEL strategies in online university classrooms cannot be overstated. With the advent of digital platforms offering alternative modes of learning, educators face the imperative of not only imparting knowledge but also nurturing the holistic development of students. As Livingston (2001) aptly observed, the contemporary education system is tasked with preparing individuals for a global information society, where adaptability and emotional intelligence are as crucial as academic prowess. Livingston and Condie (2006) emphasized the necessity for educators to adapt to the changing dynamics of education, recognizing the value of personalized learning experiences. In the realm of online education, where students have the flexibility to engage with course materials outside the constraints of traditional classrooms, SEL strategies play a pivotal role in fostering meaningful learning experiences. Providing students with opportunities for critical reflection on their studies ensures not only the enhancement of their knowledge and comprehension but also cultivates essential skills such as self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. In the literature review, the researchers employed a systematic approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize relevant studies on SEL in education, with a focus on online university settings (Booth et al., 2012). This methodical process involved several key steps to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased review of existing literature.

2.1 Historical Perspective of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL's roots are embedded in ancient philosophical teachings, evolving significantly over the centuries. Notable milestones include Plato's "The Republic," which advocated for holistic education, emphasizing the importance of nurturing both the mind and the character of students (Edutopia, 2011). Plato's vision of education was not merely about imparting knowledge but also about cultivating virtues such as wisdom, courage, and justice, laying an early foundation for what would become SEL. Throughout history, various educational philosophies have echoed this integrated approach. For instance, Confucius emphasized the role of moral education and the development of personal virtues in his teachings, advocating for a balanced development of intellect and character. Similarly, Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, or human flourishing, underscored the importance of educating the whole person, including emotional and social aspects. In the modern era, the formalization of SEL as a critical educational framework began to take shape. The establishment of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in 1994 marked a significant milestone in the SEL movement (Beatty, 2018). CASEL's mission was to advance the science and practice of SEL by defining core competencies and providing a comprehensive framework for integrating SEL into educational curricula. This initiative brought SEL into the mainstream of educational discourse, emphasizing its importance for students' academic and life success.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

(1) Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory highlights how learning is fundamentally a social process, where interaction with peers, teachers, and the community plays a crucial role in shaping our thinking and understanding. According to Vygotsky, knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and collaborative activities, meaning that we learn more effectively when we engage with others. In the context of online university classrooms, this theory underscores the importance of creating opportunities for meaningful social interactions. Virtual group work, discussion forums, and collaborative projects are not just supplementary activities; they are essential components that can significantly enhance cognitive development by allowing students to share perspectives, challenge each other's thinking, and build on collective knowledge.

(2) The broaden-and-build hypothesis, proposed by Barbara Fredrickson (2001), posits that positive emotions expand our cognitive and behavioral repertoires, facilitating personal growth. This hypothesis suggests that experiences of joy, gratitude, and love do more than just make us feel good in the moment; they also broaden our awareness and encourage novel, varied, and exploratory thoughts and actions. Over time, these positive emotions help build enduring personal resources, such as resilience, social connections, and cognitive flexibility. In an academic setting, particularly within the realm of online education, fostering a positive emotional climate can have profound impacts. Activities that promote positive emotions—such as interactive and engaging content, supportive feedback, and virtual social events—can help students feel more connected, motivated, and open to learning. This not only enhances their immediate educational experience but also contributes to their long-term personal and academic growth.

2.3 Core SEL Competencies

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been a pioneering force in the field of SEL, providing a structured framework to help educators integrate these vital skills into their curricula. CASEL identifies five core competencies that are essential for personal and academic success.

(1) Self-awareness is the ability to recognize one's emotions and values (CASEL, 2019). This competency is about understanding what we feel and why we feel that way, as well as being aware of our strengths and limitations. Self-awareness lays the groundwork for self-improvement and emotional intelligence, helping students to better understand their motivations and reactions.

(2) Self-management involves regulating one's emotions and behaviors (Weissberg, 2016). This skill is crucial for maintaining focus, controlling impulses, and setting and achieving goals. Effective self-management enables students to handle stress, stay motivated, and persist through challenges, which are essential traits for academic success and personal well-being.

(3) Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with others (Weissberg, 2016). This competency involves being able to see things from others' perspectives, appreciating diversity, and recognizing social cues. Social awareness fosters a sense of community and inclusivity, which can enhance classroom dynamics and student relationships.

(4) Relationship skills are all about building and maintaining healthy relationships (Weissberg, 2016). This includes effective communication, active listening, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Strong relationship skills help students work well in teams, develop supportive friendships, and build positive interactions with peers and adults.

(5) Responsible decision-making entails making ethical and constructive choices (Weissberg, 2016). This competency involves considering the consequences of one's actions, evaluating risks, and making decisions that reflect one's values and the well-being of others. Responsible decision-making is critical for academic integrity, social responsibility, and long-term success.

2.4 SEL in Classrooms

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential for creating supportive learning environments where students can thrive academically and personally. Integrating SEL into academic instruction, promoting a positive school climate, and fostering strong teacher-student relationships are key practices that transform the learning environment. By embedding SEL within regular lessons, creating safe and inclusive spaces, and building trust-based relationships, educators help students develop essential life skills and enhance their overall well-being (Durlak et al., 2011). Teachers who build genuine, supportive relationships with their students can significantly impact their social and emotional development. These relationships are built on trust, respect, and understanding, and they help students feel connected and motivated.

Explicit SEL instruction involves directly teaching social and emotional skills, benefiting students' overall development (Yoder, 2014). Teachers dedicate specific time to focusing on skills like self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness, integrating these lessons into the regular curriculum or teaching them as standalone sessions. This approach ensures students understand and apply SEL skills in real-life situations, equipping them to navigate social interactions, manage emotions, and make thoughtful decisions.

Integrated SEL instruction embeds social and emotional learning within academic content, making it a natural part of everyday learning rather than a separate lesson (Zins & Elias, 2007). This approach combines SEL with subjects like math, science, and literature, allowing students to develop crucial skills while engaging with the standard curriculum. For example, literature discussions on characters' emotions and science group projects can enhance empathy, teamwork, and problem-solving. By integrating SEL, teachers create a holistic learning experience, reinforcing these skills throughout the day and preparing students for complex social and academic challenges.

Whole-school approaches involve implementing school-wide programs and policies that support SEL, ensuring that social and emotional learning is integrated into every aspect of the school environment (CASEL, 2019). This means that SEL isn't just confined to the classroom but is a fundamental part of the school's culture, from the playground to the principal's office. For example, schools might adopt policies that promote a positive school climate, provide professional development for teachers on SEL, and engage families and the community in supporting students' social and emotional growth.

Mindfulness practices, like meditation and deep breathing, are effective activities for enhancing self-regulation (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). These practices help students manage stress and stay focused, providing them

with tools to calm their minds and bodies. For example, starting the day with a short meditation session can set a positive tone, while deep breathing exercises before a test can reduce anxiety and improve concentration.

Collaborative learning involves group activities designed to promote teamwork and social skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Instead of students working alone, they engage in tasks together, learning to communicate effectively, share responsibilities, and solve problems collectively. For example, in a science class, students might work in teams to conduct experiments, discuss their findings, and present their results. This not only helps them understand the material better but also teaches them how to cooperate, negotiate, and respect diverse perspectives.

Reflective practices, such as journaling and group discussions, are powerful tools for fostering self-awareness and emotional expression (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). When students take time to write about their thoughts and feelings in a journal, they develop a deeper understanding of their emotions and values. Similarly, classroom discussions that encourage students to share their experiences and reflect on their actions promote a supportive environment where emotional expression is normalized.

2.5 SEL Strategies in Universities

Universities increasingly recognize the importance of SEL for student success. Programs often include:

(1) Wellness programs offer services and resources that promote mental health and well-being (Conley, 2015). These can include workshops on stress management, access to mental health professionals, and initiatives like yoga or mindfulness sessions that help students maintain their overall wellness. By providing these resources, schools ensure that students have the support they need to thrive both academically and personally.

(2) Student support services encompass counseling and mentoring programs designed to guide students through their academic and personal challenges (Conley, 2015). These services offer a safe space for students to discuss their issues, receive professional advice, and build meaningful connections with mentors. For instance, a school might have dedicated counselors to help students with career planning or peer mentoring programs where older students support their younger counterparts.

(3) Curricular integration involves embedding SEL topics into courses and workshops, making social and emotional learning a key part of the educational experience (Paolini, 2020). This means that alongside traditional subjects, students might take classes on emotional intelligence, communication skills, or conflict resolution.

Integrating SEL in language education enhances student engagement and cultural competence. Strategies include:

Role-playing: Using simulations to practice language skills and social interactions allows students to immerse themselves in different scenarios (Meyer & Turner, 2006). For instance, students might role-play a marketplace negotiation or a job interview in the target language.

Literature discussions: Analyzing characters' emotions and motivations in literary texts helps build empathy and deeper understanding of human behavior (Durlak et al., 2011). In a language class, discussing a novel or short story enables students to explore complex emotional landscapes and moral dilemmas.

Cultural exploration: Learning about diverse cultures fosters social awareness and acceptance, crucial components of SEL (Meyer & Turner, 2006). This can include studying traditions, customs, and social norms of countries where the target language is spoken. Activities might involve researching cultural festivals, preparing traditional dishes, or watching films from different cultures.

Training faculty and staff in SEL principles promotes a supportive and inclusive learning environment by equipping educators to address students' social and emotional needs. Integrating SEL into professional development highlights the significant impact teachers have on students' overall development. Schools enable teachers to model positive behaviors and create nurturing environments through SEL training, where educators learn strategies like conflict resolution and mindfulness exercises to manage classroom dynamics and support students' well-being. This professional development empowers teachers to recognize and respond to diverse emotional needs, such as anxiety and trauma, fostering empathetic and responsive classrooms. Additionally, a school-wide approach to SEL training ensures consistent support from all staff members, creating a unified and collaborative culture. Ultimately, training in SEL principles underscores the critical role educators play in students' social and emotional growth, promoting a more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment for all.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question

The central question guiding this research is: What SEL strategies are effective for online university classrooms to improve student well-being and holistic development? As online education continues to grow, especially in the wake

of recent global events, understanding how to support students' social and emotional needs in a virtual environment is more important than ever. This research aims to explore which SEL approaches can be seamlessly integrated into online university settings to not only enhance academic outcomes but also foster a supportive, inclusive, and emotionally healthy learning environment. By identifying effective strategies, this study seeks to provide educators with practical tools to nurture students' overall development in the digital age.

3.2 Qualitative Research Method

Researchers adopt a qualitative approach to explore participants' experiences and perceptions, providing in-depth insights into SEL strategies (Creswell, 2013). This method involves gathering detailed, narrative data through interviews, focus groups, and observations, allowing for a richer understanding of how SEL practices are implemented and experienced in online university classrooms.

The study's author employs a case study methodology, focusing on a specific online university setting to gather rich, contextual data (Yin, 2018). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexities and unique dynamics of SEL implementation in an online educational environment. By concentrating on a single case, the researchers can delve deeply into the specific strategies used, challenges encountered, and outcomes observed, providing a comprehensive understanding of the context. The case study method enables the collection of various data types, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, which can be triangulated to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. This detailed, context-rich approach ensures that the findings are both theoretically robust and practically relevant, offering actionable recommendations for other institutions seeking to implement SEL in their online programs.

3.3 Data Collection

Researchers collected data through:

(1) Questionnaires: Questionnaires serve as one data collection method due to their capacity to capture diverse perspectives and experiences. Questionnaires as a data-gathering approach establish an informal connection between the information provided by the participants. Using this collection method is essential in identifying points of similarities within the responses. Questionnaires were used to gather information based on a series of questions relating to the research topic. Close-ended questions used in questionnaires should have fixed responses and unambiguous answers. Open-ended questions often create opportunities for common themes to emerge within the questionnaire and focus group (Kramer et al., 2014). Questionnaire participants acknowledged consent through the survey directions and completion. Questionnaires were sent to all teachers via email to be completed. The individuals were graduate-level university professors. The questionnaire consisted of various questions about the current teaching strategies that affect classroom SEL practices.

(2) Interviews: Interviews were a suitable method for data collection in this study as they allowed participants to discuss independent perspectives of experiences in a phenomenological context. Interviews can be a powerful tool for gaining insight into the experiences and perceptions of individuals regarding social-emotional learning in university classrooms. Research indicates the importance of individual interviews, which provide more clarity into the educational journeys that are experienced by young people (Caslin, 2021). Interviews within this study allowed the interviewer to modify the format or questions during the interview process via Zoom. Certain concepts or themes arose from the questionnaires, loosely forming the interview process. The questions were adjusted to clarify or encourage in-depth explanations during the interview via Zoom. Participants who provided contact information were requested to participate in the interviews, for which additional informed consent was obtained beforehand based on teaching experience at the university level. The survey results formed interview questions. At the close of the interview session via Zoom, participants were asked if there were additional comments, they wished to make regarding an interview topic not covered within the questions

(3) Focus Group: Focus groups foster a rich tapestry of qualitative data that transcends the limitations of quantitative measures alone. It allows for the exploration of emotions, attitudes, and beliefs that are deeply ingrained in individuals' experiences but may not surface in quantitative data points. This qualitative depth enhances the authenticity and completeness of the research, providing a holistic view of SEL practices within the university context. The capacity of a focus group is to foster open dialogue, reveal implicit knowledge, and validate existing theories, empowering researchers to understand the multifaceted dimensions of SEL. Focus group questions may represent three areas: social-emotional skills, teacher perceptions, and SEL learning strategies. These areas correlate to SEL literature related to student outcomes (Humphries et al., 2018). The focus group session allowed for the generation of data as well as member checks. The focus group consisted of three staff members who were interviewed and was conducted in person during a sixty-minute session. The session was held via Zoom. A journal was used to make notes during the discussion and an audio recording of the meeting was created with the permission

of the participant. Reminders were sent to each member two days before the scheduled meeting date. The group signed informed consent forms before participation. Immediately following the focus group session, the recording was transcribed verbatim, and all related files and materials were stored securely. The group's comments were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed, and confirmed for accuracy. Additionally, follow-up included opportunities for participants to contribute ideas they may have considered after completing the discussion. Triangulation from the questionnaires, semi-structured.

3.4 Data Management and Analysis

Coding: The first step involved coding the data, which means breaking down the interviews, observations, and documents into smaller, manageable pieces and tagging them with labels (Saldana, 2016). This process helped in identifying key themes and patterns that emerged from the data. By systematically coding the data, the researchers could highlight recurring ideas and concepts, making it easier to see how different pieces of information connected and supported each other.

Thematic analysis: Once the data was coded, the researchers moved on to thematic analysis, a method for analyzing themes to draw meaningful conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved looking closely at the coded data to identify broader patterns and insights. Thematic analysis allowed the researchers to go beyond surface-level observations and delve deeper into the underlying meanings and implications of the data.

Using qualitative data analysis software facilitated these steps by organizing the large volume of data and allowing the researchers to track and visualize the relationships between different themes.

3.5 Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

(1) **Credibility:** To ensure the credibility of the study, the researchers employed triangulation and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation involved using multiple data sources—interviews, observations, and document analysis—to cross-verify the findings. This method helped to confirm that the results were accurate and reflective of the participants' experiences. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to ensure that their perspectives were accurately represented. This process not only validated the data but also engaged participants in the research, enhancing the authenticity of the conclusions.

(2) **Transferability:** The researchers aimed to provide detailed descriptions of the study's context, methods, and findings to facilitate transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By offering comprehensive accounts of the online university setting, the SEL strategies implemented, and the participants' experiences, other researchers and educators can assess the applicability of the findings to their own contexts. This level of detail ensures that the study's insights can be replicated and adapted in different educational environments, broadening the impact and relevance of the research.

(3) **Dependability:** Consistency in methodology was key to ensuring dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers followed a structured approach throughout the study, from data collection to analysis. By maintaining a consistent methodological framework, the researchers ensured that the study could be repeated with similar results. Detailed documentation of each step in the research process provided a clear audit trail, allowing others to follow and understand the procedures used, thereby enhancing the study's reliability.

(4) **Confirmability:** To achieve confirmability, the researchers validated the findings by corroborating data from multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This involved cross-referencing the data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis to ensure that the conclusions drawn were based on objective evidence rather than researcher's bias. The use of qualitative data analysis software further supported this process by systematically organizing and comparing the data, making it easier to identify consistent patterns and themes.

The researchers assembled a purposive sample of graduate professors to assist in uncovering the phenomenon. They distributed an initial questionnaire to all university professors at the doctoral level. After analyzing the questionnaire data, the researchers identified professors who indicated an interest to participate in individual, semi-structured interviews, before conducting the interviews. The focus group allowed for a collaborative discussion to elaborate on the participants' perceptions of SEL strategies. The researchers used open, axial, and selective coding to analyze the data.

4. Presentation of the Findings

In this study, the researcher takes on the role of both observer and interpreter, striving to maintain objectivity while being mindful of potential biases (Creswell, 2013). This dual role involves carefully observing interactions and practices within the online university setting, while also interpreting the data to uncover deeper insights into the effectiveness of SEL strategies.

4.1 Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

All participants in this study were graduate-level faculty at a private university in Tennessee. Nine educators were invited to complete an online survey (Appendix A), and six responded. Of these, five expressed interests in semi-structured interviews, and four participated in focus group discussions. Interview questions were developed after survey analysis and focus group questions were determined post-interviews to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were assured of confidentiality, provided informed consent, and were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. The participants included educators with teaching experience ranging from one year to 18 years, with varied professional backgrounds from K-12 principals to grade-level professors, and extensive experience in teaching both undergraduate and graduate students online.

Participant 1: An associate professor with ten years of experience, teaching general education, advanced writing, and doctorate courses.

Participant 2: An adjunct professor with two and a half years of experience, also having served as a general education teacher in K-12 settings.

Participant 3: Seven years of teaching experience, instructing both graduate and undergraduate students online.

Participant 4: An associate tenured professor with 18 years of teaching experience at the university level.

Participant 5: An associate professor with 13 years of experience, exclusively teaching graduate-level students.

Participant 6: An adjunct professor with ten years of experience teaching both graduate and undergraduate students, and also a general education teacher in K-12 settings.

Participant 7: An adjunct professor with six months of experience teaching graduate-level students, with a background as a general education teacher in K-12 settings.

These diverse experiences provided valuable insights into the perceptions of educators concerning social-emotional learning in an online context, enriching the study's findings.

4.2 Setting Description

The researchers conducted the study in a virtual university environment, with data collected through online platforms and digital communications (Patton, 2015). The data collected for this study was obtained via Zoom meetings. One higher education institution was purposively selected for participation in this study. This university offered multiple online graduate programs and most of the professors in that program were teaching online. All educators in this institution provided educational services to students with varying learning needs, including graduate-level students and undergraduate-level students. Therefore, participants understood the entire breadth of student social-emotional learning needs and SEL strategies for the online environment.

4.3 Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

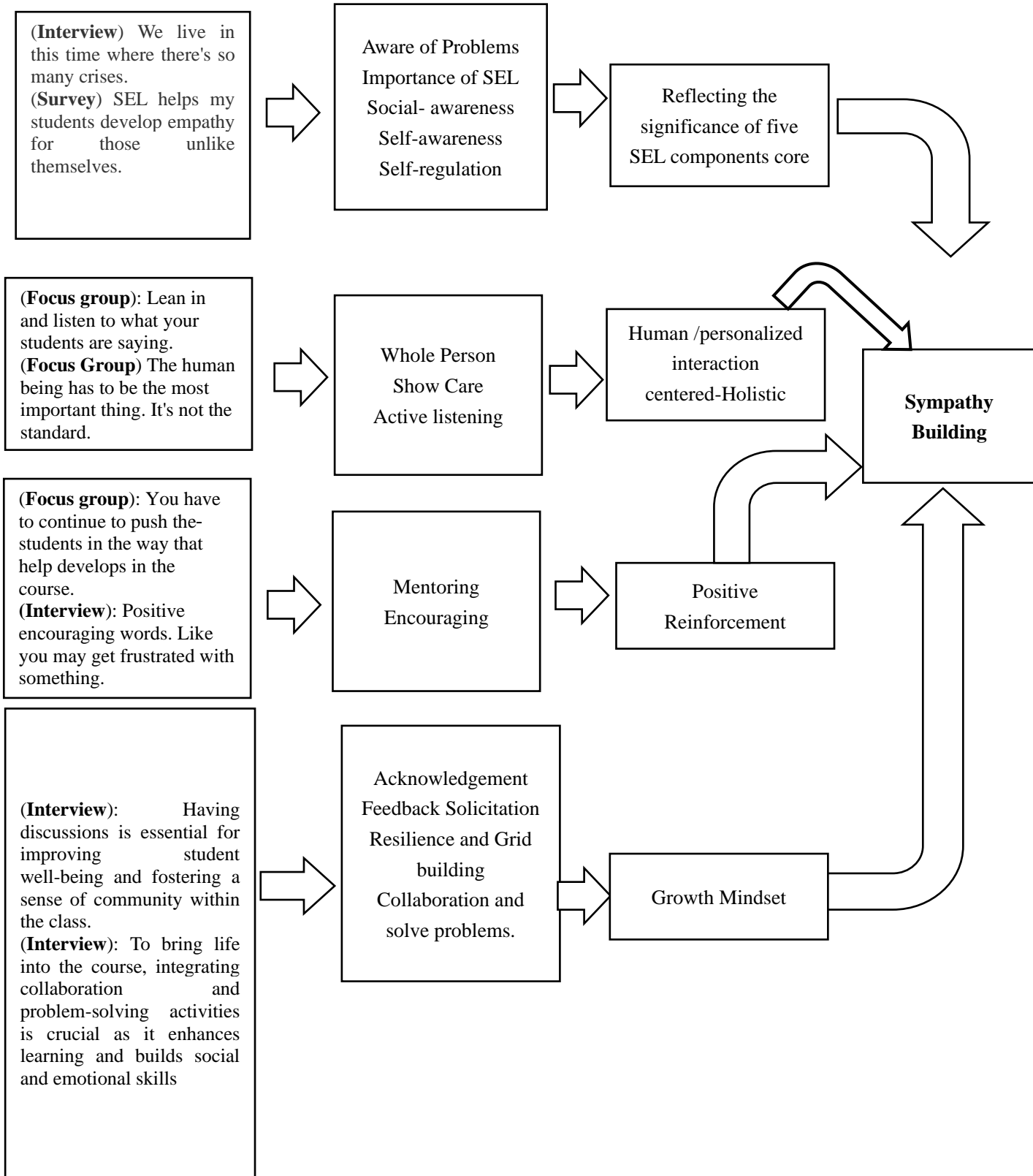
The researchers analyzed data using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to SEL strategies and their impact (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research methodology applied to investigate effective social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies in university online classrooms entails a qualitative approach to comprehensively understand and evaluate the phenomenon. The analysis began with a statistical evaluation of survey responses. Individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted after the survey collection and analysis. Temi software was utilized to transcribe the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion immediately after each discussion was completed. These transcriptions were thoroughly reviewed for accuracy. Furthermore, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, ensuring participant confidentiality and adherence to ethical guidelines.

4.4 Trustworthiness Techniques

The researchers ensured trustworthiness through triangulation, member checking, and maintaining a detailed audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because qualitative research relies on non-numerical data sources, multiple trustworthiness techniques must be included to support the findings (Ary et al., 2019). Therefore, varying qualitative measures were employed to ensure the findings' credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These measures included using thick, rich descriptions, a well-maintained audit trail, member checks, bracketing of personal beliefs, data triangulation, and peer debriefing.

4.5 Coding Table

This research sought to answer the research question: What are effective SEL strategies in online university classrooms? Figure 1 provides an example of the raw data and sources. This figure also reveals the establishment of the open, axial, and selective codes answering the research question.



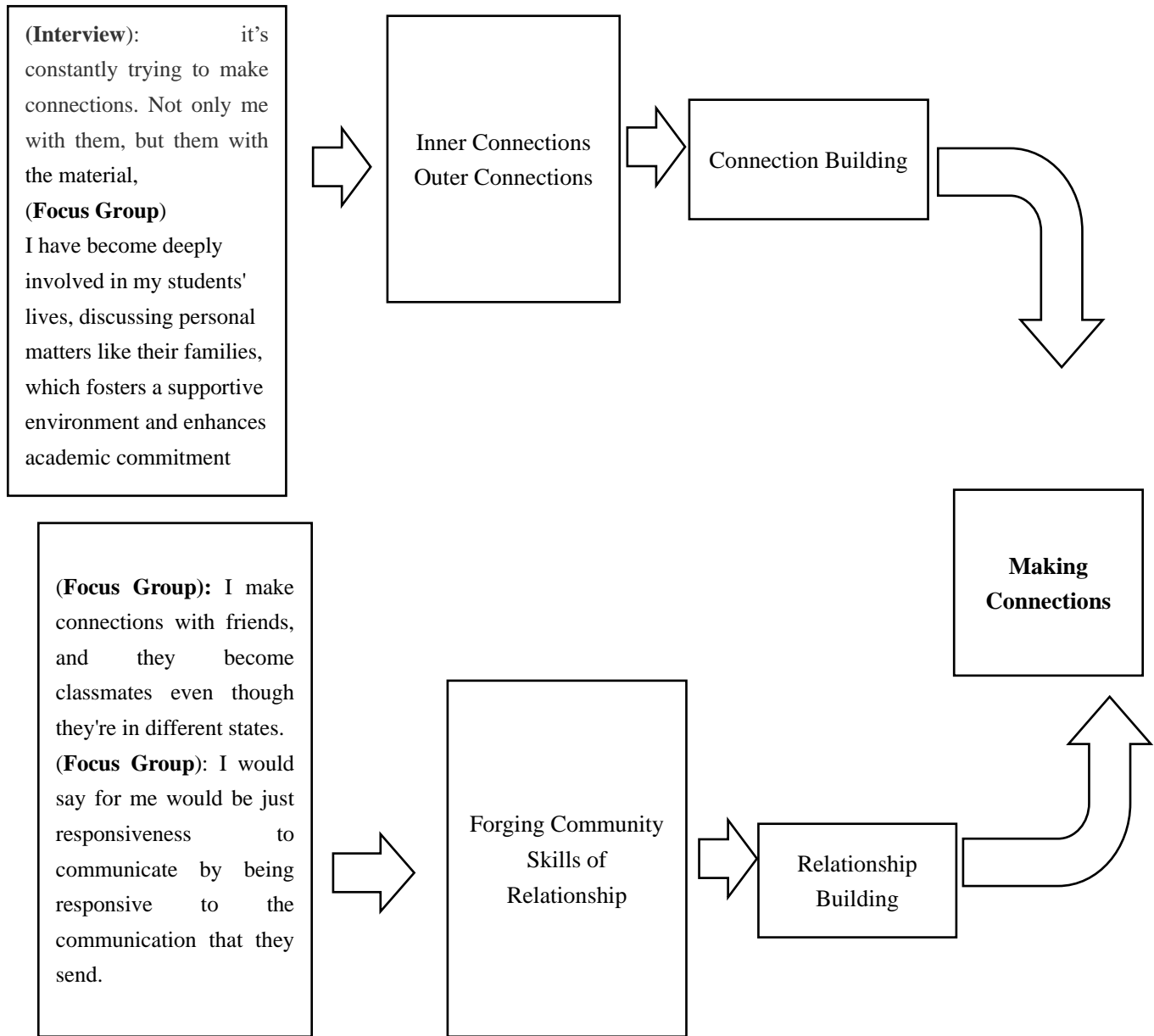


Figure 1. Example of coding to answer the research question: What are effective SEL strategies in online university classrooms?

4.6 Theme One: Empathy Building

Empathy is essential for social functioning, promoting prosocial behavior, relationship satisfaction, and the number of friends one has (Batson, 2011; Batson et al., 1988; Kardos et al., 2017; Sened et al., 2017). It also reveals motivations behind decisions to face or avoid situations (Weisz et al., 2021). Participants highlighted the five core components of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They emphasized social awareness as crucial for building relationships and understanding actions' impacts.

Participants stressed the importance of personalized, empathetic communication, seeing students as whole individuals, and building genuine human connections. Showing care involves reaching out during difficult times while maintaining boundaries. Active listening is crucial for understanding and supporting students. Positive reinforcement builds confidence and motivation, whereas fostering a growth mindset involves setting challenging tasks and providing strategic feedback.

4.7 Theme Two: Supportive Environment

Creating a supportive environment is essential for effective SEL. Participants highlighted the importance of collaborative tools, goal setting, and motivation. Collaborative tools such as discussion boards, group projects, and peer comments foster a sense of community and engagement. Accessibility and responsiveness from educators are crucial, with personalized acknowledgment and validation enhancing student engagement. Providing clear instructions and scaffolding materials helps create a cohesive learning environment. Consistent routines and weekly assignments guide student progress, whereas personalized support and flexibility meet diverse student needs.

4.8 Theme Three: Building Connections

Building connections is crucial for promoting SEL in online classrooms. Strong relationships between students and instructors enhance emotional well-being and academic success (Raider-Roth, 2005). Participants emphasized the importance of building trust and respect within the classroom and connecting with students on a personal level. Building both inner and outer connections creates a supportive environment for effective SEL learning.

Understanding students' patterns and leveraging feedback to build authentic relationships are essential skills. Establishing a professional learning community among students and educators contributes to effective SEL.

4.9 Discussion

4.9.1 Sympathy Building

Effective online SEL strategies should conclude sympathy building, which generally refers to the ability to appropriately recognize the emotional condition of another and effectively express this understanding. Participants addressed the importance of understanding and sharing the feelings of others, which is crucial for fostering empathy and creating a supportive online learning environment. This finding is supported by the research of Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, and Levine (2009), who noted empathy is the capacity of a teacher to make pupils feel heard, understood, and supported. Along with identifying building empathy, study members pointed out that active listening is an important process to build empathy. This finding connects to Weger Jr et al. (2014), who contended that active listening is considered an important communication skill in a variety of occupational and therapeutic fields. Participants mentioned the awareness of five core SEL components, self-awareness, social-awareness, self-regulation, responsible decision making, and problem solving. Self-awareness connects to the research of Mayer et al., (2004), which discussed assessing feelings and behavior and recognizing the impact on others. Participants identified self-awareness is a critical component of being able to identify emotions, as well as the triggers of emotions. Social awareness connects to the research of Weissberg (2016), which noted social awareness includes the ability to understand, empathize with, and show compassion for those who have differing beliefs. Participants addressed the importance of using social awareness to understand and show compassion to others which is a very important element to build sympathy. Self-management connects to Gullone et al. (2010) who noted self-management enables others to persevere, overcome challenges, and manage emotions effectively. Participants addressed that self-management is important. An example of this would be if students' complete homework on time. SEL regulation also connects to self-regulated learning (SRL). Boekaerts & Cascallar (2006), noted that SEL can be broadly defined as the extent to which learners are active participants of their own learning process by means of monitoring and controlling self-motivation, metacognition, cognition, and behavior toward achieving their learning goals. Participants emphasized the importance of self-regulation, especially in professions that demand meeting deadlines and delivering work consistently. These participants used terms such as 'more cooperative' or 'submit in time' to describe self-regulated learning and self-management during the online learning process. Participants also mentioned mentoring and encouraging. This finding connects to Kelley (2003), who discussed mentorship programs. By increasing understanding and insights around these principles, children can access and experience their natural, innate well-being and prevent negative developmental outcomes. However, participants did not discuss outside mentoring programs such as campus clubs and organizations. Turner (2023) suggested that SEL helps promote positive results. Participants mentioned cultivating growth mindset in students. These findings connect to Nagarajan (2021), who noted that with a growth mindset, one is expected to offer sincere congratulations and be motivated by success. This includes success for themselves and the others around them. Participants indicated that educators are responsible for helping students develop a growth mindset. These participants used terms such as "challenging work," or "continue to push," to describe a growth mindset which is fostered through the presentation of challenging work and the encouragement to persist. The findings also support Laal (2012), who confirmed that collaborative learning is an approach where students work together in a group to complete a task, solve a problem, or create something. These participants used terms such as "common mission," or "use good collaboration," to describe the importance of collaborative thinking to building connections.

4.9.2 Supportive Environment

Data collected for this study indicated a supportive environment can foster the social-emotional development of students. Creating a supportive learning environment is derived from motivations, collaborative tools, availability, and scaffolding. This finding connects to Erwin (2020), who noted that a socially emotionally supportive setting is the solution to increasing student achievement. The SEL solution helps students and adults master critical social-emotional skills, encourages student leadership, provides effective and compassionate behavior management strategies, and increases student success. Participants mentioned building positive relationships with students by providing encouragement and affirmation. Participants also mentioned discussion is a good collaborative tool to communicate and make friends. Students become friends instead of just typing comments. Participants mentioned routines and instructions to forge supportive online environment for students. This finding connects to Norris (2003), who noted SEL can be included in the teaching environment. SEL is not viewed in this context as an adjunct to the teacher but rather as the method that relationships, routines, and processes are developed to ensure that everyone feels cared for, respected, and appreciated. While participants entered the discussions surrounding routines and teaching environment topics, the findings did not mention the effective classroom presented by Evertson et al. (1994), who noted that effective classrooms provide an environment where students feel safe to take risks, increase knowledge, and feel like valued members of a community. These findings also support Schonert-Reichl et al. (2016) and Mashburn et al. (2008), who mentioned positive classroom climate and well-managed, emotionally positive preschool classrooms promote academic and social success.

Making Connections

Building connections was also identified as an effective SEL strategy in online environments. Participants identified that building inner and outer connections with students is essential for successful online environments. Participants used terms such as “part of their life” or “interact” to describe the importance of building connections. This finding correlated with Valdés (2006), who noted that students must also see the classroom as a learning community where students can work collaboratively in cooperative learning groups. Listening carefully to students and showing respect through small acts of attention build a sense of classroom community. Participants included language such as “community” and “relationships” to foster collaboration. It was noted that lifelong connections with students promote student long-term wellbeing. This finding also aligned with the theory framework of this study, The Broaden-and-Build Hypothesis. This theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how positive emotions, such as those fostered by SEL programs can lead to a broader outlook and an increase in personal resources. When students develop social and emotional skills through SEL, more positive emotions are present. In turn, this can broaden thinking, enhance interpersonal connections, and contribute to overall well-being (Fredrickson, 2001 & 2005).

5. Conclusions, Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions and Summary of Findings

The integration of SEL strategies in online university classrooms is indispensable for nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped to thrive in an interconnected world. By prioritizing social and emotional development alongside academic achievement, educators can empower students to navigate the complexities of the global information society with resilience, empathy, and confidence. All participants in this study have more than 1 year of teaching online undergraduate or graduate students at the university. These professors aspire to significantly increase student well-being and academic achievement with effective SEL strategies. The participants noted multiple effective SEL strategies for online students that can improve students’ overall performance and well-being.

5.2 Limitations

Within this qualitative, phenomenological research study, there were external factors, or limitations, that might affect the outcomes presented. One such limitation could be the small sample size. The limited number of participants (eight professors) might not provide a comprehensive representation of the diverse perspectives and experiences within the academic community. Therefore, the research might not capture the full spectrum of SEL strategies utilized in online university classrooms due to the narrow focus on the perspectives of only eight professors.

5.3 Implications

SEL in online university classrooms has received widespread research attention for years because of its widespread relevance and pervasive opinions thereon. Researchers have dedicated extensive study to SEL strategies, how educators perceive their importance and value, and the strategies in the classroom.

All participants in the study agreed that consideration should be given to relationship building, which led to a

conversation about the promotion of peer interaction and collaboration. A finding shared by Adams and Iwashita (2014) indicated positive effectiveness during peer interactions. Participants expressed that relationship building can promote interactions and collaborations. This study provides insight into SEL strategies centered around connection-building that can facilitate meaningful interactions among students in virtual classrooms.

5.4 Recommendations

The researchers recommends that educators should prioritize integrating activities and interventions that foster empathy among students; creating opportunities for connection building through collaborative projects, peer interactions, and online discussion forums; and establishing a supportive environment by providing adequate resources, clear communication channels, and opportunities for feedback and reflection.

6. Conclusion

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, the researchers sought effective SEL strategies in online university classrooms. The research participants were university professors who have experience in teaching online students at a private university in Tennessee. The researchers gathered data through closed-ended surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group discussion. Data analysis revealed three key themes: empathy building, connection building, and fostering a supportive environment. The findings highlighted the importance of incorporating activities that promote sympathy, such as active listening and human-centered perspectives to enhance student engagement and overall well-being in online classrooms. With such effective strategies identified, schools and professors must prioritize activities that promote empathy among students, facilitate opportunities for connection through collaborative projects and peer interactions, and create a supportive learning environment with clear communication channels and resources. Further research is suggested to assess the effectiveness of specific SEL interventions aligned with these themes and their influence on student success in online university classrooms.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions

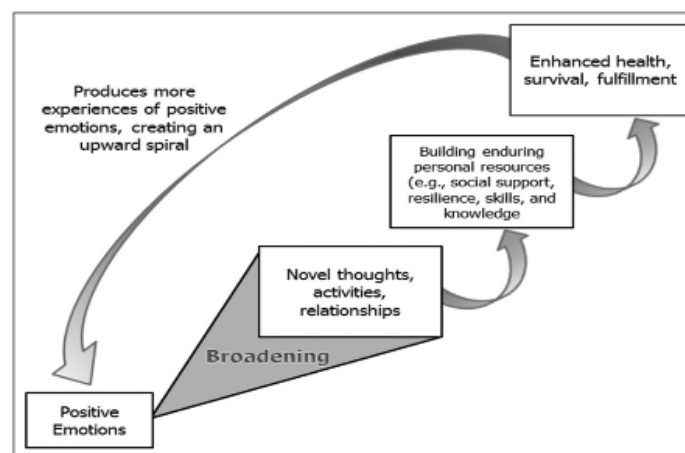


Figure 1. The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions
(Source: Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010)

Appendix B

Survey

By completing this questionnaire, you are giving your permission to be included in this study.

Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA)

Please respond to the following statements regarding your perceptions and experiences of social-emotional learning's impact on the university student:

- | | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Social-emotional learning enhances students' academic learning. | | | | | |
| 2. Social-emotional learning effectively develops "soft skills" for university students (e.g., time management, communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving skills). | | | | | |
| 3. University students have sufficient social-emotional learning skills. | | | | | |
| 4. University students value social-emotional learning strategies. | | | | | |
| 5. Social-emotional learning reduces stress for university students. | | | | | |
| 6. University students at my school maintain healthy social-emotional learning levels. | | | | | |
| 7. It is important for university professors to teach social-emotional strategies. | | | | | |
| 8. Social-emotional learning enhances university online classroom behavior. | | | | | |
| 9. My students have the resources they need to independently enhance their social-emotional learning ability. | | | | | |
| 10. The professors at my school know how to teach social-emotional learning strategies. | | | | | |
| 11. Professors feel confident about teaching social-emotional strategies online. | | | | | |

Please respond to the following short answer questions based on your instructional experience:

(1) What makes social-emotional learning effective for online university students?

(2) If you would be interested in being part of the interview process about the effective social-emotional learning strategies in the university online classroom, please provide your contact information below:

Name:

Email Address:

All questionnaire responses will remain confidential.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Questionnaire Informed Consent

Study title: Effective Social-Emotional Learning in the Online University Classroom

Investigator: Xiaqing Chang

DESCRIPTION

The focus of this study is to discover effective social-emotional learning strategies in online university classrooms. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have an awareness or influence over decisions made related to effective social-emotional learning strategies in online university classrooms.

Participating in a research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the option to withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or wish to withdraw at any time, you will not be penalized. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a short survey related to industry certification tests in high schools.

Confidentiality will be ensured by reporting the research results by using pseudonyms and generalized results in the writing. Datas collected will be stored in such a way as to ensure that research data and information obtained from and about research participants are not improperly divulged. All survey responses will be kept in a password-protected account.

RISKS

There are minimal risks involved in the study. The IRB (International Review Board) of Carson-Newman University has given permission for this study. Although all data are anonymous, the possible risk for taking part in this research is having someone else find out that you were in a research study.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research study. The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is the opportunity to strengthen decision-making related to industry certification programs within secondary education and have your voice and perspective heard.

Contacts for questions or concerns?

Contact Xiaqing Chang by email at Xiaqing Chang xchang@cn.edu if you have any questions about the study, any concerns, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, or any injuries, or you think that something unusual or unexpected is happening. The chair of this study may also be contacted: Dr. Julia Price (jprice@cn.edu), director of the Carson-Newman University Advanced Programs

CONSENT

You are deciding whether to participate in a research study. Your participation in the following questionnaire indicates that you have decided to participate in the study after reading all information above and you understand the information in this form. In addition, any questions you may have were answered, and you have received a copy of this form to keep.

I have read this informed consent document. I understand each part of the document, and I am voluntarily choosing to participate in this study.

Signature _____ Date _____ Research Participant

Signature _____ Date _____ Researchers

Informed Consent – Semi-Structured Interview

Study title: Effective Social-Emotional Learning in the Online University Classroom

Principal Investigator: Xiaqing Chang

The focus of this study is to discover effective social-emotional learning strategies in online university classrooms. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have an awareness or influence over decisions made related to effective social-emotional learning strategies in online university classrooms.

Participating in a research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the option to withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or wish to withdraw at any time, you will not be penalized. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview via Zoom to discuss industry certification programs.

RISKS

There are minimal risks involved in the study. The IRB (International Review Board) of Carson-Newman University has permitted this study. Although all data are anonymous, the possible risk of taking part in this research is having someone else find out that you were in a research study.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research study. The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is the opportunity to strengthen decision-making related to industry certification programs within secondary education and have your voice and perspective heard.

Confidentiality will be ensured by reporting the research results using pseudonyms in the writing. Data collected will be stored in such a way as to ensure that research data and information obtained from and about research participants are not improperly divulged. All transcripts and recordings will be kept in a password-protected account.

Contacts for questions or concerns?

Contact Xiaqing Chang by email at xchang@cn.edu if you have any questions about the study, any concerns, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, or any injuries, or you think that something unusual or unexpected is happening. The chair of this study may also be contacted: Dr. Julia Price, director of the Carson-Newman University Advanced Programs, jprice@cn.edu

Consent

You are deciding whether to participate in a research study. Your agreement below indicates that you have decided to participate in the study after reading all the information above and you understand the information in this form. In addition, any questions you may have were answered, and you have received a copy of this form to keep.

I have read this informed consent document. I understand each part of the document, and I am voluntarily choosing to participate in this study. By signing below, I consent to participate.

Signature _____ Date _____ Research Participant

Signature _____ Date _____ Researchers

Informed Consent – Focus Group

Study Title: Effective Social-Emotional Learning in the Online University Classroom

Principle Investigator: Xiaqing Chang

The focus of this study is to discover effective social-emotional learning strategies in online university classrooms. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have an awareness or influence over decisions made related to effective social-emotional learning strategies in online university classrooms.

Participating in a research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the option to withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or wish to withdraw at any time, you will not be penalized. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group via Zoom with other research participants and discuss issues regarding industry certification test programs.

RISKS

There are minimal risks involved in the study. The IRB (International Review Board) of Carson-Newman University has given permission for this study. Although all data are anonymous, the possible risk of taking part in this research is having someone else find out that you were in a research study. As a focus group participant, there is a risk that other focus group participants will know your identity and that you participated in the study.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research study. The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is the opportunity to strengthen decision-making related to industry certification programs within secondary education and have your voice and perspective heard.

Confidentiality will be ensured by reporting the research results using pseudonyms in the writing. Data collected will be stored in such a way as to ensure that research data and information obtained from and about research participants are not improperly divulged. All transcripts and recordings will be kept in a password-protected account.

Contacts for questions or concerns?

Contact Xiaqing Chang by email at xchang@cn.edu if you have any questions about the study, any concerns, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, or any injuries, or you think that something unusual or unexpected is happening. The chair of this study may also be contacted: Dr. Julia Price, director of the Carson-Newman University Advanced Programs, jprice@cn.edu

Consent

You are deciding whether to participate in a research study. Your agreement below indicates that you have decided to participate in the study after reading all the information above and you understand the information in this form. In addition, any questions you may have were answered, and you have received a copy of this form to keep.

I have read this informed consent document. I understand each part of the document, and I am voluntarily choosing to participate in this study. By signing below, I consent to participate.

Signature _____ Date _____ Research Participant

Signature _____ Date _____ Researchers

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How do you define social-emotional learning?
2. What are your expectations of social-emotional learning?
3. Can you describe any specific strategies or approaches you have found effective in promoting social-emotional learning? How do these strategies differ from traditional in-person settings?
4. What role do online discussion forums, virtual group projects, and other collaborative tools play in fostering a sense of community and emotional well-being among students in an online learning environment?
5. How do you define online student–teacher relationships?
6. How do you determine a student’s growth regarding social-emotional learning?
7. What challenges have you observed in facilitating social-emotional learning in online university classrooms, and how have you addressed or overcome them?

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Guide

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your definition of social-emotional learning?
2. What are your expectations of social-emotional learning?
3. What specific online learning experiences or activities have you found most beneficial in promoting social and emotional growth among students in this virtual environment? Can you provide examples of successful instances?
4. How do you define online student–teacher relationships?
5. How do you think the instructor’s role and engagement in an online learning environment contribute to the social-emotional well-being of students?
6. What challenges do students face in terms of their social and emotional development in an online university classroom?

Appendix F
Memoing From Sources

Memos Open Codes and Supporting Memos	Data Sources				Participants								
	Survey	Interviews	Focus Group	# Sources	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participants
Awareness of Problems		X	X	2		X	X	X	X	X			5
Importance of SEL	X	X	X	3	X	X		X	X				
Self-Awareness	X		X	2	X	X	X	X	X		X		6
Social Awareness	X		X	2	X	X	X					X	3
Self-Regulation		X	X	2		X						X	2
Active Listening		X	X	2		X	X	X		X	X		5
Whole Person		X	X	2		X	X	X			X		4
Showing Care	X	X	X	3		X	X			X	X		4
Mentoring	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Encouraging	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Feedback Solicitation and Reflection		X	X	2	X	X	X		X		X	X	6
Resilience and Grit Building		X	X	2	X	X					X		3
Collaboration and Problem-Solving		X	X	2	X	X	X						3
Arousing Motivations		X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
Setting Expectations	X	X	X	3		X	X	X	X		X		5
Phones, Emails, Texting		X	X	2		X		X		X		X	4
Zoom Meeting/Open House	X	X	X	3				X	X	X	X		4
Discussion/Discussion Board		X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Assignment	X	X	X	3	X	X		X		X	X		5
Acknowledgment/Recognition/Individual	X	X	X	3		X				X	X	X	4
Availability	X	X	X	3		X		X					2
Flexibility		X	X	2		X							1
Instructions		X	X	2		X		X			X	X	4
Constancy and Routine		X	X	2		X			X		X		3
Inner Connections					X	X			X		X		4
Outer Connections		X	X	2	X	X	X		X	X	X		6
Forging Community		X	X	2	X	X					X		3
Skills of Relationship-Finding Patterns and Balance		X	X	2		X	X			X	X		4

Appendix G

Development of Open Codes From Memos

Memos Open Codes and Supporting Memos	Data Sources				Participants								
	Survey	Interviews	Focus Group	# Sources	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participants
Awareness of Problems		X	X	2		X	X	X	X	X			5
Importance of SEL	X	X	X	3	X	X		X	X				
Self-Awareness	X		X	2	X	X	X	X	X		X		6
Social Awareness	X		X	2	X	X	X					X	3
Self-Regulation		X	X	2		X						X	2
Active Listening		X	X	2		X	X	X		X	X		5
Whole Person		X	X	2		X	X	X			X		4
Showing Care	X	X	X	3		X	X			X	X		4
Active Listening		X	X	2		X	X	X		X	X		5
Mentoring	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Encouraging	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Feedback Solicitation and Reflection		X	X	2	X	X	X		X		X	X	6
Resilience and Grit Building		X	X	2	X	X					X		3
Collaboration and Problem-Solving		X	X	2	X	X	X						3
Arousing Motivations		X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
Setting Expectations	X	X	X	3		X	X	X	X		X		5
Phones, Emails, Texting		X	X	2		X		X		X		X	4
Zoom Meeting/Open House	X	X	X	3				X	X	X	X		4
Discussion/Discussion Board		X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Assignment	X	X	X	3	X	X		X		X	X		5
Acknowledgment/Recognition/ Individual	X	X	X	3		X				X	X	X	4
Availability	X	X	X	3		X		X					2
Flexibility		X	X	2		X							1
Instructions		X	X	2		X		X			X	X	4
Constancy and Routine		X	X	2		X			X		X		3
Inner Connections					X	X			X		X		4
Outer Connections		X	X	2	X	X	X		X	X	X		6
Forging Community		X	X	2	X	X					X		3
Skills of Relationship-Finding Patterns and Balance		X	X	2		X	X			X	X		4

Appendix H

Development of Axial Codes From Open Codes

Memos Axial Codes and Supporting Open Codes	Data Sources				Participants								
	Survey	Interviews	Focus Group	# Sources	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participants
Reflecting the Significance of Five Core SEL elements	X	X	X	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Awareness of Problems		X	X	2		X	X	X	X	X			
Importance of SEL	X	X	X	3	X	X		X	X				
Self-Awareness	X		X	2	X	X	X	X	X		X		6
Social Awareness	X		X	2	X	X	X					X	3
Self-Regulation		X	X	2		X						X	2
Human/Personalized Interaction-Centered-Holistic Well-Being	X	X	X	3		X	X	X		X	X		5
Active Listening		X	X	2		X	X	X		X	X		5
Whole Person		X	X	2		X	X	X			X		4
Showing Care	X	X	X	3		X	X			X	X		4
Active Listening		X	X	2		X	X	X		X	X		5
Positive Reinforcement	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Mentoring	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Encouraging	X	X	X	3		X	X		X		X		4
Growth Mindset		X	X	2	X	X	X		X	X	X		6
Acknowledgment/Recognition/Individual	X	X	X	3	X				X	X	X	X	5
Feedback Solicitation and Reflection		X	X	2	X	X	X		X		X	X	6
Resilience and Grit Building		X	X	2	X	X					X		3
Collaboration and Problem-Solving		X	X	2	X	X	X						3
Motivation/Goal Setting	X	X	X	3	X	X	X	X	X				5
Arousing Motivations		X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
Setting Expectations	X	X	X	3		X	X	X	X		X		5
Using Collaborative Tools	X	X	X	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Phones, Emails, Texting		X	X	2		X		X		X		X	4
Zoom Meeting/Open House	X	X	X	3				X	X	X	X		4
Discussion/Discussion Board		X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Assignment	X	X	X	3	X	X		X		X	X		5
Accessibility and Availability	X	X	X	3		X		X		X	X	X	5
Availability	X	X	X	3		X		X					2
Flexibility		X	X	2		X							1
Structure/Scaffolding Materials		X	X	2		X		X	X		X	X	5

Instructions	X	X	2		X		X		X	X	4
Constancy and Routine	X	X	2		X			X		X	3
Making Connections	X	X	2	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
Inner Connections	X	X	2	X	X	X		X		X	5
Outer Connections	X	X	2	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
Developing Relationships	X	X	2	X	X	X			X	X	5
Forging Community	X	X	2	X	X					X	3
Skills of Relationship- Finding Patterns and Balance	X	X	2		X	X			X	X	4

Appendix I

Example of Coding Process

Coding Process Example for Emergent Theme 1: Empathy Building	Memo	Open Code	Axial Code
(Interview) We live in this time where there’s so many crises. We have war, we have economic problems. We have work problems, social problems.	Awareness of problems	Awareness of problems	of Reflecting the significance of SEL core elements
(Focus Group) So social-emotional learning in the classroom is about me feeling safe, my understanding myself, my understanding others.			
(Interview) But the other side of social-emotional learning is not about me, but it’s about the other person.	Awareness of importance of elements	Awareness of importance of SEL elements	
(Survey) SEL helps my students develop empathy for those unlike themselves, yet look at the world through the lenses of right and wrong, not necessarily what “feels” good. SEL is more than just “feeling good” about situations. It (hopefully) positively affects decision-making.			
(Focus Group) It’s about me feeling safe.	Self-awareness	Self-awareness – SEL elements	
(Interview) Think about, uh, what they’re doing and how they’re doing it and how it’s going to affect their school, their community, and themselves.			
(Interview) Social-emotional learning is not about me, but it’s about the other person.	Social awareness	Self-awareness – SEL elements	
(Focus Group) How you support students in acquiring skills like empathy and respect, fairness, and also maybe how to manage conflict as well.	Self-regulation	Self-regulation – SEL elements	
(Interview) Then it makes a more, it			

<p>makes your student, you know, have the ability to self-manage their work.</p>	<p>Whole person/human-centered</p>	<p>Caring person</p>	<p>Whole person/human-centered</p>
<p>(Focus Group) The human being has to be the most important thing. I's not the standard.</p>			
<p>(Interview) These elements are so critical because you have to look at the whole child, the whole student, and understand and have that empathy; you are building the next generation of leaders in the world.</p>			
<p>(Survey) You care and connect to the student more. And vice versa.</p>	<p>Showing care</p>	<p>Showing care</p>	
<p>(Focus Group) And knowing that sometimes there are things bigger than a dissertation, right?</p>			
<p>(Focus group) Lean in and listen to what your students are saying.</p>	<p>Active listening</p>	<p>Listening to show sympathy</p>	
<p>(Interview) You have to help the people understand the context. So you have to be able to describe things in a way that goes beyond just reading and writing and researching.</p>			
<p>(Focus Group) Ensuring that they understand that what they have or what they are going through is very important to us.</p>			
<p>(Focus group) You have to continue to push, but you do it in a way that develops.</p>	<p>Mentoring</p>	<p>Mentor to push forward</p>	<p>Positive reinforcement</p>
<p>(Survey) Modelling the expectations around interactions (communication is critical). Day-to-day support and responsiveness are important as students navigate classes and assignments.</p>			
<p>(Focus Group) Giving them challenging work. And when you give a student challenging work that doesn't lead to frustration, but you give them challenging work, you say, I believe you can do this.</p>	<p>Encouraging</p>	<p>Encouraging</p>	
<p>(Interview) Positive encouraging words. Like you may get frustrated with something. She may encourage you or give you, you know, constructive suggestions.</p>			
<p>(Focus Group) Students provided feedback on my evaluation, and I believe it's crucial to align with what</p>	<p>Acknowledgment</p>	<p>Acknowledgment</p>	<p>Growth mindset</p>

they consider important.

(Interview) And just by putting a name at the top, that makes it more personal.

(Focus Group) There’s a lot of focus on that at the school level in terms of morning meetings and the way that teachers support students. But I think, from my perspective, it’s about how we leverage that feedback to build meaningful connections and enhance the overall learning experience..

Feedback solicitation

Feedback solicitation

(Focus Group) I think one of the main pieces for me is that I’ve been able to leverage feedback to really think about how to build authentic relationships with students in the class.

(Focus Group) Adults learn how to work through challenging situations.

Resilience and grit building

Resilience and grit building

(Interview) Understand about others, then I think those next things that come are resilience and grit.

(Interview) They have to have the discussion, and it brings them together as a class. I think that it does take that routine and it takes good collaboration.

Collaborations and problem-solving

Collaborations and problem-solving

(Interview) You have to put some life into the course with the collaboration. What happens when people collaborate? They have to solve problems.

Coding Process Example for Emergent Theme 2: Supportive Environment

(Interview) Getting someone motivated to get back on track and pushing them along.

Arousing motivation

Arousing motivation

Setting expectations and motivation

(Interview) And then I think just within the dissertation, chairing, keeping people motivated to the end of the light.

(Interview) So I think the biggest thing for the online learning is that in the preparation for the course and the course instructions, that you’re clear in your communication and setting the expectations for the work for the responses.

Setting expectations

Setting expectations

(Focus Group) Key word—would say authenticity. And expectations.

(Interview) When I know that I need to maybe send an email or I need to make

Phones, emails, texts to contact students

Phones, emails, texts

Using collaborative tools

a phone call. Sometimes just a phone call. Just a personal phone call. Hey, what's going on? Can I help you?

(Interview) You know, I give out my cell phone, my email address, and I tell students, "Hey, if you got a question, don't sit on it. Don't wait."

(Interview) We do give the feedback through the portal, and we're able to communicate that way. But there was something special around the open houses that professors have.

(Survey) Adding live opportunities (i.e., Zoom, in-house open house, etc.) can provide environments in which university students can experience, develop, and refine their SEL skills.

(Interview) considering that feedback when you're putting together assignments, lessons, and learning opportunities is essential. This includes incorporating survey writing activities, goal setting, and weekly assignments to ensure they are meaningful and engaging for students.

(Focus Group) Like right now, I've had students, you know, we're out for the Christmas break, but I've been on the phone with my doctoral students.

(Survey) Day-to-day support and responsiveness are important as students navigate classes and assignments.

(Interview) I think you need to have an ability to work with a variety of individuals, and you need to look at their needs.

(Focus Group) The university made accommodations that if, you know, somebody were sick or they couldn't get into the research they let them finish in summer for free.

(Focus Group) I like the structure, but you also have to have that personal piece.

(Interview) Maybe shar[ing] an example would be good if they're confused.

(Interview) It's constantly trying to make connections.

(Interview) Because when they have

Zoom and open house with students Zoom and open house with students

Giving assignments Assignments

Availability Availability and flexibility

Flexibility

Instruction Scaffolding

Routines and consistency

those consistent routines, I feel like, such as like a weekly assignment where to go and what to complete.

Coding Process Example for Emergent Theme 3: Building Connections

(Focus Group) From my purview and my perspective, it's how we leverage that feedback and build those connections.

Inner connections

Building connections

(Interview) It's constantly trying to make connections. Not only me with them, but them with the material.

(Focus Group) Now, you've talked to them about their kids. You've become part of the family.

Outer connections

(Focus Group) Whatever it is, business, teaching families, church, whatever, it's about relationships.

(Focus Group) A lot of them become professional colleagues because some of them will step into the role as a professor or more of an instructor on a college level or university level.

Forging community

Developing relationships

(Focus Group) And they make connections with friends and they become classmates even though they're in different states.

(Focus Group) I would say for me would be just responsiveness to communicate by being responsive to the communication that they send.

Skills of relationship

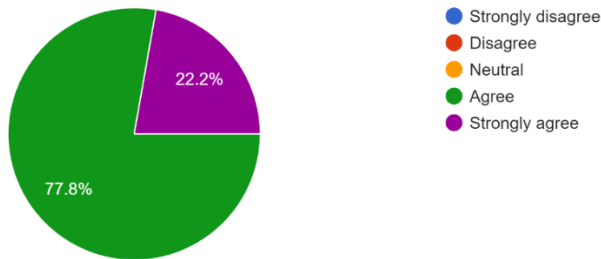
(Interview) So what is the purpose of the learning? The purpose of the learning is not just to know the facts, but it's to be able to communicate and take the facts into a new situation.

Appendix J Participant Questionnaire Response Totals by Question

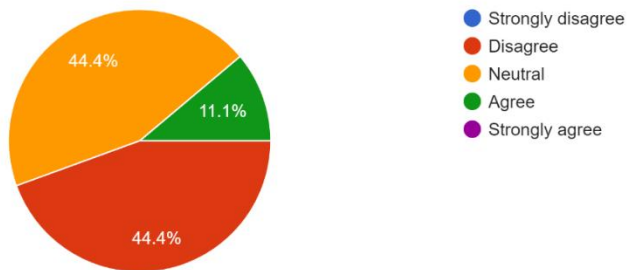
Social-emotional learning enhances student academic learning.
9 responses



Social-emotional learning effectively develops "soft skills" for university students (e.g. time-management, communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving skills).
9 responses

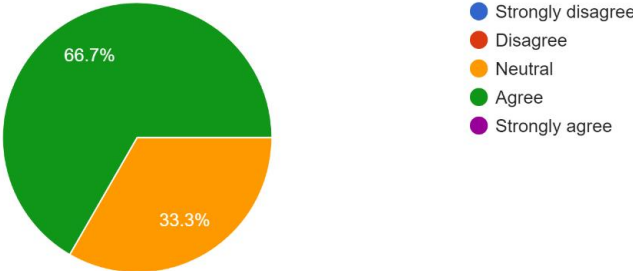


University students have sufficient social-emotional learning skills.
9 responses



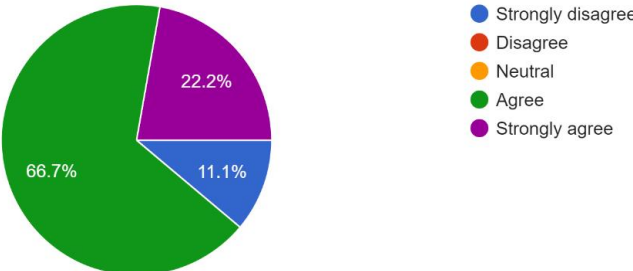
University students at my school maintain healthy social-emotional learning levels.

9 responses



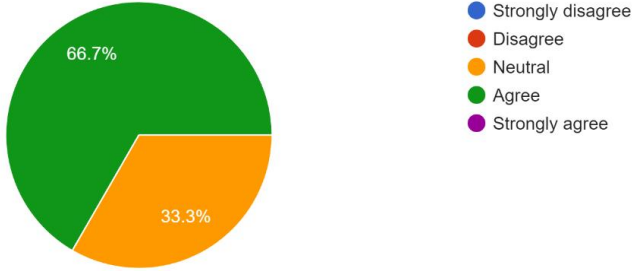
Social-emotional learning reduces stress for university students

9 responses



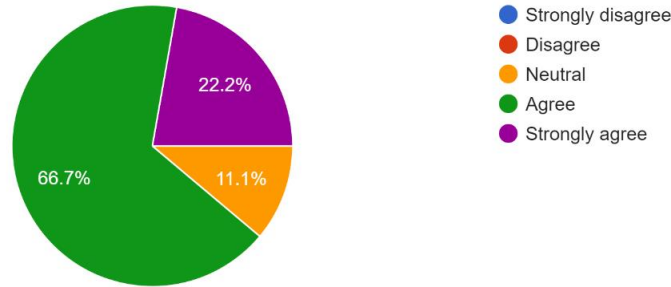
University students at my school maintain healthy social-emotional learning levels.

9 responses



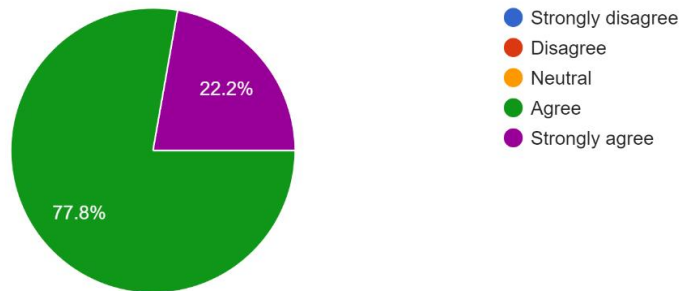
It is important for university professors to teach social-emotional strategies.

9 responses



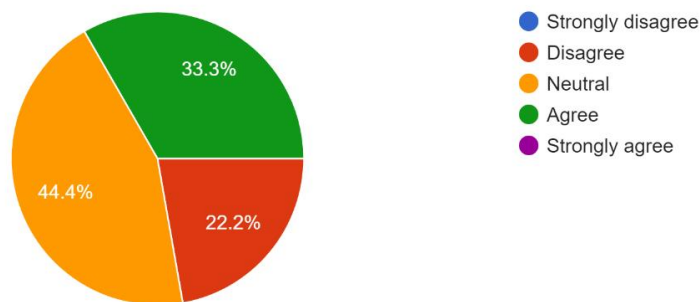
Social-emotional learning enhances university online classroom behavior.

9 responses



Professors feel confident about teaching social-emotional strategies online.

9 responses



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