

The Role of Social-Emotional Learning in Online ELT Teacher Training: A Case of Gender

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Abstract

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential for teacher effectiveness, yet its incorporation into online English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher training—particularly via a gender-responsive lens—needs further exploration. This study examined the way SEL can be incorporated in a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental online ELT teacher training program lasting for 10 weeks, which embedded reflection and discussion with video-based tasks every week. Sixty pre-service teachers (30 identifying as female, 30 as male) took part in the study. Data were gathered from pre- and post-intervention SEL surveys, online discussion transcripts, and semi-structured interviews. Overall, SEL competencies had a significant increase (e.g., $t(59)=7.84$, $p<.001$). Females demonstrated higher gains in empathy and interpersonal communication, whereas males indicated greater gains in self-regulation. Effect size analyses indicated that gender explained 8–10% of the variance in self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication—medium effects that highlight practically significant differences in the way male and female trainees gained from the program. Qualitative findings showed that differences by gender in communication, emotional expression, and responsiveness to feedback formed online engagement. Results suggest that integrating SEL explicitly in ELT teacher training promoted SEL competencies pertinent to professional practice. Results pinpoint the value of incorporating SEL in online training settings and adapting activities in ways that are responsive to observed gender-based engagement differences within cohorts.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL); ELT; Online teacher training

Introduction

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to the process of enhancing self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). SEL has been worldly renowned as a basis for efficient teaching and professional resilience (Hymel et al., 2018; Osher et al., 2016). These competencies are essential both for promoting a positive classroom atmosphere and for enhancing teachers' educational efficiency and emotional well-being (Jennings et al., 2019). As online education expands rapidly, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, there is both a challenge and an opportunity in integrating SEL in digital teacher preparation (Durlak et al., 2015).

In English Language Teaching (ELT), SEL is particularly essential due to the high demands of the profession for intercultural sensitivity, communicative competence, and

emotional flexibility (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In spite of this, the explicit incorporation of SEL into online ELT teacher education still needs further exploration, particularly from a gender-responsive perspective (Hellerstein & Neumark, 2020; Roeser et al., 2000). Research studies have suggested that gendered patterns of emotional expression, responsiveness to feedback, and communication may affect the way male and female trainees engage with activities based on SEL (Brackett, 2019; Gilligan et al., 2006).

Researchers have contended that traditional teacher training often underestimates SEL, deeming emotional competence as secondary to educational or linguistic knowledge (Hymel et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017). This gap is especially apparent in online settings, where the lack of nonverbal cues, reduced immediacy, and restricted interpersonal rapport can impede emotional engagement (Barnes, 2024; Nugroho et al., 2022). Meanwhile, online contexts seem to introduce new affordances for SEL through processes like reflective journaling, asynchronous discussion, and video-based exercises in empathy (Weissberg et al., 2015).

This study tries to respond to three interrelated gaps: (1) SEL in teacher education has been studied more frequently in face-to-face than in online environments, (2) SEL in ELT-specific training needs more investigation, and (3) potential differences concerning gender in SEL engagement have received inadequate empirical attention. By taking these gaps into consideration, this study attempts to further its understanding of the way SEL can be efficiently integrated into online ELT teacher education using a gender-responsive approach.

Statement of the Problem

Although Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has been globally recognized as necessary for teacher efficiency and well-being, its role in online ELT teacher training programs is still inadequately theorized and applied (Hymel et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2019; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). As ELT classrooms become diverse every day and emotionally challenging, teachers require both linguistic and educational knowledge, together with the emotional and relational competencies that SEL presents. However, many teacher education programs cannot integrate SEL systematically, especially in virtual learning settings (Nugroho et al., 2022).

The shift to online training, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has concurrently introduced challenges and opportunities for SEL incorporation. From one perspective, restricted interpersonal interaction, reduced immediacy, and asynchronous communication can impede emotional relation and social presence—factors which are necessary to SEL (Barnes, 2024; Taylor et al., 2017). Conversely, online settings suggest affordances like reflective journaling, asynchronous discussions, and multimedia tasks that can help the growth of SEL if purposefully designed.

At the same time, research studies suggest that gender can affect the way learners process emotions, interact with their peers, and respond to pedagogical feedback (Brackett, 2019; Gilligan et al., 2006). Nevertheless, in spite of these differences SEL engagement has received, little empirical attention in teacher education—especially in the field of ELT and in online settings.

Therefore, as stated in the previous section, we face three interrelated research gaps: (1) SEL incorporation in teacher training has been investigated more in face-to-face contexts than in online programs, (2) SEL in ELT-specific training needs further investigation, and (3) the potential effect of gender on SEL development in digital learning settings is not adequately understood. Without considering these gaps, training programs risk preserving gender-based inequalities in emotional competence and professional development.

This study addresses this immediate need by investigating the way SEL can be integrated into online ELT teacher training and the way male and female trainees engage with and gain from these elements differently. By so doing, it tries to help the design of more encompassing, gender-responsive teacher education programs that prepare emotionally intelligent language teachers for the demands of classrooms today.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant on both theoretical and practical levels. Concerning theoretical significance, this study contributes to the growing scholarship on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) by situating it within the underexplored context of online ELT teacher education. Previous studies have primarily focused on SEL in K–12 settings or in face-to-face teacher preparation, leaving digital pedagogical environments insufficiently addressed (Hymel et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2019). By concentrating on online ELT training, this study both fills a gap in the literature and pinpoints the significance of SEL for a professional area that requires high intercultural sensitivity and emotional regulation (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

Meanwhile, the study emphasizes gender as the main analytic lens. As global discourses increasingly put emphasis on gender equality in education, examining how male and female teacher students engage differentially with SEL elements responds to a significant academic and social imperative. Previous research has offered that gender can affect emotional expression, feedback responsiveness, and communication patterns (Gilligan et al., 2006). Nevertheless, little research has examined these dynamics in an online ELT teacher training setting.

As to practical significance, findings from this study have direct implications for program designers, instructional developers, and policy-makers. By demonstrating that SEL integration improves pre-service teachers' competencies and that gender mediates this growth, the research provides an evidence-based framework for designing gender-responsive teacher education programs. For instance, for females who valued dialogic feedback, implement structured peer-feedback sessions using collaborative online tools. For male teacher trainees, who gained benefits in self-regulation with structured feedback, use interactive simulations with clear performance rubrics, drawing on methods for online learning. This is especially valuable for online settings where emotional cues are diminished and chances for spontaneous interpersonal relations are restricted. Adapting SEL strategies—like activities to build empathy, structured reflective discussions, and self-regulation tasks—to the requirements of different trainees can foster both equality and efficiency in teacher preparation.

Lastly, this research may affect broader teacher education policies by underpinning the significance of integrating SEL as a key component of training. Doing so calls for a holistic

model of teacher education that fosters both intellectual and methodological competence, together with emotional resilience and interpersonal development.

Purpose of the Study

This study intends to investigate the way Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is incorporated into online ELT teacher training and to examine gender-based differences in how male and female trainees develop and apply SEL competencies throughout the training process. To this end, the following research questions/hypotheses were posed:

Research Questions

1. Does participation in an online ELT teacher training program that integrates SEL significantly affect pre-service teachers' overall SEL competencies?
2. Are there any significant differences between male and female pre-service teachers in the development of specific SEL competencies such as empathy and self-regulation?
3. Do male and female trainees differ significantly in their perception and engagement with the SEL components of online ELT teacher training?

Null Hypotheses

- **H01:** Participation in an online ELT teacher training program that integrates SEL does not significantly affect pre-service teachers' overall SEL competencies.
- **H02:** There are no significant differences between male and female pre-service teachers in the development of specific SEL competencies such as empathy and self-regulation.
- **H03:** Male and female trainees do not differ significantly in their perceptions of or engagement with the SEL components of online ELT teacher training.

Literature Review

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is rooted in constructivist and humanistic theories of education, which puts emphasis on both knowledge acquisition and learners' general progress. Based on the widely used framework developed by CASEL, SEL consists of five interconnected competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). These competencies are not just personal qualities; rather, they directly inform efficient teaching practices by providing teachers with tools and instruments to have a proper understanding of themselves, regulate emotions, create connections through relationships, and make ethical choices in professional settings (Weissberg et al., 2015). Researchers have also addressed the psychological and neurobiological foundations of SEL, relating it to emotional intelligence models (Brackett, 2019) and resilience-oriented approaches that help educators manage stress and cope with challenges in their teaching practice (Roeser et al., 2000). In sum, this body of work places SEL as an indispensable aspect of teacher development, converging with issues such as mindfulness, well-being, and the sustained construction of professional identity.

In spite of this strong theoretical basis, SEL has not been consistently incorporated into teacher preparation programs. Much of the attention to SEL has historically been paid to K–12 settings, where it has been put into practice via curricula and classroom interventions. Nevertheless, in teacher education, research studies have suggested that training programs often prioritize cognitive and pedagogical competencies, deeming social-emotional growth as secondary or peripheral (Hymel et al., 2018). Yet integrating SEL into teacher training is necessary for preparing reflective and emotionally intelligent professionals who are capable of navigating different classroom settings (Jennings et al., 2019). Effective approaches consist of structured reflection, cooperative learning, and journaling activities that enhance empathy, classroom management, and self-regulation (Hellerstein & Neumark, 2020). Even so, researchers keep calling for more systematic SEL curricula supported by reliable assessment tools that can assess both short-term and long-term effectiveness (Osher et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017).

The need for structured approaches became even more apparent throughout the sudden global pivot to online education triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In digital settings, the lack of physical immediacy and nonverbal cues often makes it difficult for instructors and students to make emotional connections, thereby weakening the very conditions under which SEL flourishes (Nugroho et al., 2022). Nevertheless, online learning also introduces distinctive avenues: asynchronous reflection, multimedia expression, and flexible peer interaction can create new conditions for social-emotional engagement (Durlak et al., 2015; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). However, to take advantage of these potentials, course designers must purposefully tackle weakened social cues and actively support interaction to foster equitable participation (Barnes, 2024). This balance between the drawbacks of emotional detachment and the potentials of creative engagement pinpoints the significance of integrating technological innovation with student-centered instruction in designing online SEL experiences.

In this changing digital landscape, gender turns out to be another significant factor in the way individuals experience SEL. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that women often have higher levels of empathy and relational skills, while men may show higher inhibition but greater structured self-regulation, especially in performance-driven contexts (Gilligan et al., 2006; Brackett, 2019; Hellerstein & Neumark, 2020). If overlooked, such inclinations can affect the degree to which trainees engage in or take advantage of SEL activities. However, inclusive approaches that consider these differences may improve participation, reduce attrition, and continue more equitable learning results (Osher et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017). Accordingly, the design of gender-responsive SEL strategies has become increasingly known as a matter of pedagogical equality rather than merely a pedagogical preference.

The significance of these factors becomes more pronounced in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Language teaching needs a lot of intercultural negotiation, communicative adaptability, and the ability to cope with learners' anxieties, all of which would make it emotionally demanding for the teacher (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Instructors with strong SEL competencies have more potential to promote inclusive classrooms, create strong rapport with different learners, and keep their own professional motivation (Jennings et al., 2019). However, ELT teacher education has traditionally put emphasis on linguistic mastery and knowledge of methodology, often to the detriment of emotional preparation (Roeser et al., 2000). When this gap converges with online delivery, where relational cues have already been reduced,

the need for intentional strategies that foster empathy, perspective-taking, and efficient communication becomes even more necessary (Taylor et al., 2017).

Recent scholarship has responded by suggesting integrative models that unite digital education with gender-responsive SEL design. These approaches frequently use varied tasks, structured peer-feedback systems, and interactive activities that are sensitive to variations in gendered communication norms (Brackett, 2019; Hymel et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that when SEL is adapted in this way, learners report more satisfaction, show greater emotional processing, and develop more robust interpersonal skills (Gilligan et al., 2006). Particularly, for online ELT training—where relational subtlety is easily lost—such customization is both useful and necessary for keeping engagement and equality.

In sum, the literature shows the multidimensional value of SEL in teacher education, the growing potentials and risks of online delivery, and the possible impact of gender on engagement and results. Yet notable gaps remain. SEL has been examined far more in school-based settings than in teacher preparation, and even when teacher training is addressed, ELT programs are rarely the focus. Moreover, the intersection of SEL, gender, and online education has been insufficiently investigated, leaving questions about how these dynamics interact in practice. Addressing these gaps, the present study seeks to empirically examine the integration of SEL into online ELT teacher training and to analyze how male and female trainees may experience its components differently. By doing so, it aims to advance both scholarly understanding and the design of more inclusive, gender-responsive approaches to professional preparation.

Methodology

Participants

Sixty pre-service ELT teacher trainees (30 male, 30 female) who enrolled in an online teacher training program took part in this study. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 30 (Mean age = 25.5, SD = 1.8) and represented diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. All trainees had advanced English proficiency (CEFR C1 or higher), basic digital literacy, and prior experience using online learning platforms. Gender identity was self-reported. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design using a non-equivalent groups pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design. The quantitative strand measured SEL competencies before and after a 10-week intervention, while the qualitative strand examined participants' reflections and interactions to provide interpretive depth. Data collection and analysis followed a convergent parallel design, enabling simultaneous interpretation of numerical outcomes and participant experiences.

Instruments

Using three complementary instruments, data were collected. First, the SEL Competency Survey, adapted from CASEL's validated SEL framework and revised for ELT contexts. This adaptation consisted of developing new ELT-specific scenarios for items related to social awareness and responsible decision-making, like managing intercultural misunderstandings in a language classroom, and was reviewed by a panel of five expert ELT educators for content validity. SEL Competency Survey measured five domains—self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and internal consistency reliability was established (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). In addition, online discussion logs from weekly forums were gathered and content-analyzed for indicators of emotional insight, empathy, peer support, and conflict resolution. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a stratified sample of 12 participants (6 male, 6 female) to elicit deeper reflections on their engagement with SEL modules and perceptions of gender dynamics (Nugroho et al., 2022).

Procedure of the Study

The program lasted 10 weeks and incorporated SEL systematically across weekly themes. Each week, combined asynchronous educational videos introducing SEL concepts, reflective journaling tasks designed to promote self-awareness, and online discussion forums that fostered empathy, feedback exchange, and collaborative problem-solving. Gender-responsive activities were also embedded, consisting of case studies demonstrating diverse emotional expression styles and different reflection signals. Surveys were administered at Week 1 (pre-test) and Week 10 (post-test), while semi-structured interviews were implemented in the final week, and discussion transcripts were collected during the program.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on Transformative Learning Theory, which explains how critical reflection promotes shifts in perspective, and in the CASEL SEL Framework (2020), which structured both the pedagogical design and the competencies measured.

Data Analysis

By employing paired-samples *t*-tests, quantitative data were analyzed to detect pre- and post-intervention changes, and then, ANCOVA was used to test for gender interactions while controlling for baseline SEL scores. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were reported to establish the magnitude of differences. Qualitative data from interviews and discussion logs were coded thematically using NVivo software. Both inductive and deductive coding approaches were used, guided by the CASEL framework. Inter-coder reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = .82$) confirmed consistency. Findings from both strands were incorporated into the interpretation to triangulate the findings.

Results

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative strand of the study assessed changes in teacher trainees' social-emotional competencies before and after the 10-week online SEL-integrated training program. Paired-samples t-tests indicated a statistically significant improvement in overall SEL competencies across the cohort ($t(59) = 7.84, p < .001$), thereby rejecting the first null hypothesis (H_{01}), which stated that participation in an online ELT teacher training program that integrates SEL does not significantly affect pre-service teachers' overall SEL competencies. Descriptive statistics, the mean difference, and paired-samples statistics are presented in Table 1 below (overall SEL composite).

Table 1. Overall SEL — Pre/Post (Paired Samples t-test; $N = 60$)

| Outcome (composite) | Pre M | Post M | Mean diff (Post – Pre) | SD of diff | t (df) | p | Cohen's d (paired) | 95% CI (mean diff) |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|------------------------|------------|-----------|--------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Overall SEL composite | 3.18 | 4.10 | 0.92 | 0.91 | 7.84 (59) | < .001 | 1.01 | [0.69, 1.16] |

An ANCOVA controlling for baseline scores tested gender effects for each competency. Results revealed statistically significant gender differences for Self-Regulation, Empathy, and Interpersonal Communication, but not for Self-Awareness or Responsible Decision-Making, thus rejecting the second null hypothesis (H_{02}), which stated that there are no significant differences between male and female pre-service teachers in the development of specific SEL competencies such as empathy and self-regulation (See Table 2 and Figure 1).

- **Self-Awareness.** Males improved from $M = 3.21$ ($SD = 0.62$) to $M = 3.85$ ($SD = 0.58$) ($\Delta = +0.64$); females from $M = 3.25$ ($SD = 0.59$) to $M = 3.92$ ($SD = 0.61$) ($\Delta = +0.67$). The gender effect was not significant, $F(1, 57) = 1.21, p = .27$, partial $\eta^2 \approx .021$.
- **Self-Regulation.** Males rose from $M = 3.05$ ($SD = 0.71$) to $M = 4.33$ ($SD = 0.60$) ($\Delta = +1.28$); females from $M = 3.12$ ($SD = 0.68$) to $M = 3.85$ ($SD = 0.66$) ($\Delta = +0.73$). The gender effect was significant, $F(1, 57) = 6.11, p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 \approx .097$ (medium). A partial η^2 of .097, representing a medium effect, indicates that gender accounted for nearly 10% of the variance in Self-Regulation. This is a noteworthy influence on teacher training efficacy, suggesting that tailored approaches could yield substantial differences in outcomes.
- **Empathy.** Males increased from $M = 3.18$ ($SD = 0.64$) to $M = 4.03$ ($SD = 0.55$) ($\Delta = +0.85$); females from $M = 3.20$ ($SD = 0.61$) to $M = 4.62$ ($SD = 0.49$) ($\Delta = +1.42$). The gender effect was significant, $F(1, 57) = 5.67, p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 \approx .090$. This represents a medium effect, suggesting that gender explained about 9% of the variance in empathy gains. In practice, this indicates that female trainees' substantially higher growth in empathy is not only statistically reliable but also meaningful for teacher training efficacy, pointing to the importance of designing activities that foster perspective-taking and relational skills across genders.
- **Interpersonal Communication.** Males improved from $M = 3.09$ ($SD = 0.69$) to $M = 3.88$ ($SD = 0.63$) ($\Delta = +0.79$); females from 3.14 (0.66) to 4.49 (0.54) ($\Delta = +1.35$). The gender

effect was significant, $F(1, 57) = 4.92, p = .03$, partial $\eta^2 \approx .079$. This effect, also in the medium range, shows that gender accounted for nearly 8% of the variance in communication outcomes. Practically, this suggests that female trainees' stronger development in communication skills constitutes a noteworthy difference, highlighting the value of tailoring online training to support varied communicative preferences and to ensure equitable participation.

- **Responsible Decision-Making.** Males increased from 3.28 (0.58) to 4.01 (0.52) ($\Delta = +0.73$); females from $M = 3.30$ ($SD = 0.57$) to $M = 4.05$ ($SD = 0.56$) ($\Delta = +0.75$). The gender effect was not significant, $F(1, 57) = 0.98, p = .33$, partial $\eta^2 \approx .017$.

Taken together, these medium-sized effects¹ For self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication demonstrate that gender accounted for meaningful proportions of variance (8–10%) in key SEL competencies, underscoring that tailoring online teacher training to gender-responsive needs can yield practically significant improvements in professional preparation. To be more specific, it can be said that females showed larger gains in Empathy and Interpersonal Communication, whereas males showed larger gains in Self-Regulation. Gains in Self-Awareness and Responsible Decision-Making were comparable across genders.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Test SEL Competency Scores by Gender

| Competency | Male Pre (M, SD) | Male Post (M, SD) | Female Pre (M, SD) | Female Post (M, SD) | F- value | Sig. |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|------|
| Self-Awareness | 3.21 (0.62) | 3.85 (0.58) | 3.25 (0.59) | 3.92 (0.61) | 1.21 | 0.27 |
| Self-Regulation | 3.05 (0.71) | 4.33 (0.60) | 3.12 (0.68) | 3.85 (0.66) | 6.11 | .01* |
| Empathy | 3.18 (0.64) | 4.03 (0.55) | 3.20 (0.61) | 4.62 (0.49) | 5.67 | .02* |
| Interpersonal Communication | 3.09 (0.69) | 3.88 (0.63) | 3.14 (0.66) | 4.49 (0.54) | 4.92 | .03* |
| Responsible Decision- Making | 3.28 (0.58) | 4.01 (0.52) | 3.30 (0.57) | 4.05 (0.56) | 0.98 | 0.33 |

¹ **Note.** Partial η^2 values are reported as indices of effect size, where $\approx .01$ is considered small, $\approx .06$ medium, and $\geq .14$ large (Cohen, 1988). In this study, the significant effects for self-regulation ($\eta^2 \approx .097$), empathy ($\eta^2 \approx .090$), and interpersonal communication ($\eta^2 \approx .079$) fall within the medium range, indicating that gender accounted for approximately 8–10% of the variance in these competencies.

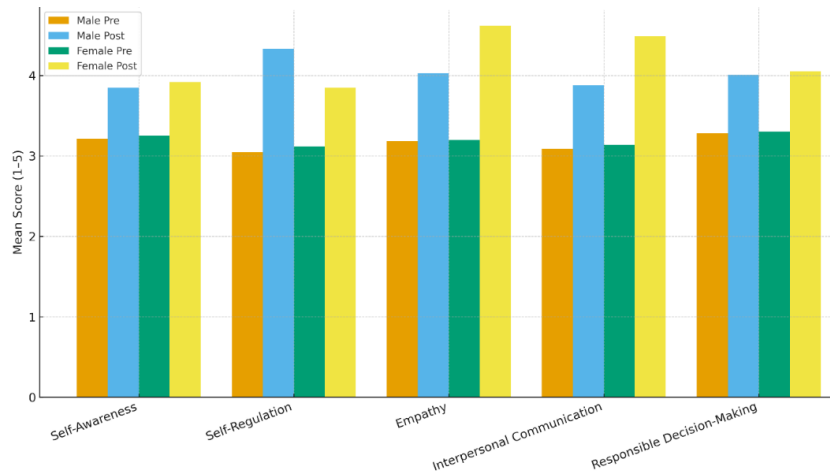


Figure 1. Pre- and post-test SEL scores by gender across competencies

Figure 1 illustrates pre- and post-test SEL scores by gender across competencies. Both groups show upward trajectories, but the sharper increase in empathy and communication among females contrasts with the steeper rise in self-regulation among males.

Table 3. Gender-based Comparisons of SEL Competencies After Training

| Competency | Male Gain (Post-Pre) | Female Gain (Post-Pre) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Self-Awareness | 0.64 | 0.67 |
| Self-Regulation | 1.28 | 0.73 |
| Empathy | 0.85 | 1.42 |
| Interpersonal Communication | 0.79 | 1.35 |
| Responsible Decision-Making | 0.73 | 0.75 |

Table 3 presents post-training comparisons between male and female participants across the five SEL domains. While both groups demonstrated improvements, the gain results indicate that significant gender differences were observed in self-regulation (males had a higher gain), empathy, and interpersonal communication (females had a higher gain), whereas self-awareness and responsible decision-making did not differ significantly. This suggests that gender played a differential role in shaping specific SEL outcomes, thereby addressing the second null hypothesis (H_{02}). The table thus provides clear evidence that the impact of SEL-based training may vary across domains and between genders, underscoring the need for nuanced consideration of gender dynamics in online teacher education.

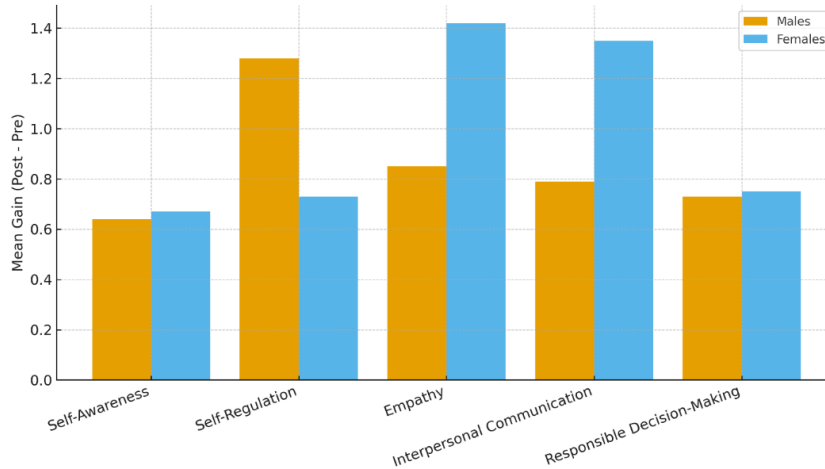


Figure 2. SEL gains by gender across competencies

Note. Figure 2 illustrates mean SEL gains by gender across competencies. Consistent with the ANCOVA results, gender explained medium proportions of variance ($\eta^2 \approx .079-.097$) in self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication, reflecting practically meaningful differences (8–10%) in how male and female trainees benefited from the program.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of discussion logs and semi-structured interviews indicated three convergent themes characterizing participants' engagement with SEL in the online ELT context.

1. **Patterns of Emotional Expression.** Female trainees reported frequent perspective-taking and emotional disclosure; male trainees described more restrained, task-oriented expression.
2. **Feedback Responsiveness.** Females valued dialogic, affectively rich feedback; males emphasized concrete, stepwise feedback that supported performance monitoring and regulation.
3. **Perceptions of Gender Dynamics Online.** Both groups noted that muted nonverbal cues in online settings complicated relational work; structured prompts and reflective journaling supported regulation and equitable participation.

Taken together, these findings reject H_{03} , confirming that significant gender-based differences exist in how trainees develop and perceive SEL competencies in online ELT teacher training.

Discussion

This study examined the role of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in online ELT teacher training, concentrating on gender. The results show that SEL competencies increased drastically for all participants, although there were notable gendered patterns. Female trainees exhibited greater gains in empathy and interpersonal communication, while male trainees indicated much

more progress in self-regulation. Additionally, the effect size analyses support this issue: gender explained about 8–10% of the variance in self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication, reflecting practically significant differences that go beyond statistical significance and pinpointing the need for purposeful, gender-responsive design in online teacher training. Gains in self-awareness and responsible decision-making were comparable within the groups. These findings are broadly in line with previous scholarship underscoring SEL's possibility to promote holistic teacher growth in digital settings (Brackett, 2019; Jennings et al., 2019).

A key insight is related to how gender formed SEL trajectories. Among these participants, female trainees put emphasis on perspective-taking, emotional disclosure, and dialogic forms of feedback, which may explain their greater success in empathy and communication (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). However, male trainees highlighted structured, performance-focused feedback, making it in line with their greater growth in self-regulation (Gilligan et al., 2006). These results reinforce previous claims that gendered socialization can affect the way teacher trainees deal with relational dimensions of learning (Barnes, 2024; Nugroho et al., 2022). Such differences, however, should be deemed as contextual patterns, but not as essential traits, reminding us of the situated and socially mediated nature of SEL (Roeser et al., 2000).

The qualitative data provided deeper insight into the complexities of online learning. Trainees from both groups underscored the challenges of interpreting emotions when nonverbal cues were restricted, mirroring challenges pointed out in past research studies of digital classrooms (Taylor et al., 2017). Structured signals, reflective journaling, and scaffolded online discussions were deemed as beneficial tools and instruments for redressing these restrictions and promoting more balanced participation. These strategies are in line with transformative learning perspectives, which stress deep reflection and dialogic exchange in shaping professional identity (Mezirow, 2000; Weissberg et al., 2015).

From a practical perspective, the study proposes three practical domains. First, in curriculum design, integrating SEL across weekly modules can help establish emotional awareness as part of ELT teacher education. Second, in online teaching, using reflective journals and explicit scaffolding can neutralize the lack of embodied cues. Third, concerning gender responsiveness, training programs should establish flexible participation opportunities that validate various communicative preferences and regulatory strategies. Such steps may foster more encompassing online training settings where SEL functions as a basis for both professional competence and well-being (CASEL, 2020).

Several restrictions must be taken into consideration. The sample size was not large enough, participants were drawn from one language school, and gender was deemed as binary, possibly ignoring more subtle features. Data relied on self-report tools and short-term measures, which may not completely reflect long-term SEL development. Additionally, the emphasis on self-report may give rise to the bias of social desirability, through which participants intentionally or unintentionally overreport positive transformations in order to be in line with the assumed program expectations or show themselves in a favorable light. Such inclinations could increase the measured success in SEL competencies, thus affecting the validity of the observed enhancements. Therefore, future research should supplement self-report data with behavioral

observations, performance-based assessments, or longitudinal designs that can triangulate results and give a sounder account of continued professional development.

Taken together, the study asserts the value of SEL for online ELT teacher training while disclosing significant gender-related dynamics. It shows that embedding SEL into digital education programs both supports emotional and relational capacities and underscores the need for educational practices attentive to the diverse ways trainees deal with such learning.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in online ELT teacher training with a focus on gender. Findings revealed significant gains in all SEL competencies, with females showing stronger growth in empathy and interpersonal communication, and males demonstrating greater improvement in self-regulation. The medium effect sizes observed ($\eta^2 = .079-.097$) indicate that gender meaningfully shaped 8–10% of the variance in key SEL outcomes, reinforcing the practical importance of embedding gender-responsive SEL strategies into online teacher preparation. These results extend prior work emphasizing the importance of SEL for teacher development (Jennings et al., 2019) by illustrating how gender shapes engagement in online training contexts.

The study supports teacher training by presenting empirical data that SEL can be efficiently promoted in digital learning settings. It also emphasized the need for curriculum designers and teacher trainers to integrate SEL systematically into online ELT programs, making sure that activities are both relationally sound and flexible to different engagement styles (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In the meantime, the results reveal the significance of gender-responsive educational practices that recognize how trainees may be different in their orientations for feedback and expressing their emotions (Barnes, 2024).

As the final statement, in a situation where teacher training is implemented mostly online, the present research study offers that SEL provides a powerful framework for enhancing both professional competence and resilience, empathy, and inclusivity (Roeser et al., 2000). By integrating SEL into online ELT teacher education, institutions can better prepare future educators to navigate the cognitive, emotional, and social demands of language teaching in a digital age, though it must be noted that the reliance on self-report data may introduce social desirability bias; thus, future studies should incorporate more objective measures to validate these outcomes.

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