



UDC 378.017:[378.018.8:373.011.3-051]:373.5:[36:159.42-049.3](045)  
**DEVELOPING EFL TRAINEE TEACHERS' READINESS FOR PROVIDING  
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO SECONDARY SCHOOL  
LEARNERS**

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**Abstract.** *The ongoing war in Ukraine has caused psychological trauma for learners and teachers. Education can play a crucial role in helping learners suffering from psychological trauma due to war. It can stimulate resilience, nurture learners' social and emotional development, and give children and communities hope for the future. EFL trainee teachers would benefit from knowledge about trauma and adversity when responding to children's challenging behaviours. In education, such understanding and techniques are known as "trauma-informed pedagogy". Social and emotional learning programs address trauma as part of their broader aim to improve secondary learners' behaviour and academic performance. By developing knowledge about the impact of trauma on children, prospective EFL teachers are likely to develop stronger relationships, and a greater sense of confidence with these children, and lower classroom disruption. This could lead to increased job satisfaction and reduced risk of burnout.*

**Key words:** *social-emotional learning (SEL), psychosocial supports (PSS), project "Professional Development for Instructors of Pre-Service EFL Teachers" well-being, toxic stress, resilience, mindfulness.*

### **Introduction.**

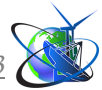
The war in Ukraine has had a devastating impact on educational system at all levels. Thousands of institutions have been damaged or destroyed, and millions of educators and learners have been displaced from their homes. Moreover, the war has caused a great deal of psychological trauma for both, children who learn and teachers that educate them.

Educators may never have a clear answer as to whether or not a learner has experienced trauma, nor a full picture of a learner's emotional well-being or needs. Due to these limitations, educators must always embody trauma responsiveness in all of interactions with learners to ensure that support is provided to any and all of them.

### **Main text.**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) provides children and adults with the tools to be well and to succeed in life. SEL involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

There is research evidence that strongly suggests the importance of SEL for children who have faced severe adversity, including poverty, displacement and violence, in particular, due to war. Crisis and conflict have direct and profound effects on children's physical safety, well-being and ability to learn. Neuroscience has shown that children who experience the types of adversity common in crisis settings can have a physiological 'toxic stress' response that inhibits their brain



development, affecting their physical and mental health, cognition, behaviour and relationships [1]. EFL trainee teachers need to understand stress and reasons to do SEL. A toxic stress response for a child can occur when he/she experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity – such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship – without adequate adult support. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress-response system can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment well into the adult years [2].

The author is honoured to be a part of the U.S. Embassy supported project “Professional Development for Instructors of Pre-Service EFL Teachers”. It is a year-long project focused on the preparation of English language teachers in Ukraine. This project is a collaboration between the Center for Professional Learning at Childhood Education International and Hunter College of the City University of New York with funding from the Regional English Language Office of the Embassy in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State. The participation in the project provides intensive professional development to teacher education faculty in order to enrich English language pedagogy in Ukraine, while also attending to the vitally important integration of mental health and psychosocial supports (PSS), including SEL. The team of 30 faculty members selected from dozens of applicants across Ukraine are designing the syllabus for EFL trainee teachers addressing their needs in providing psychosocial support to their perspective school students.

The purpose of this publication is to outline the indicative content of the course introducing social-emotional learning into English Language Teaching which will prepare EFL trainee teachers for providing psychosocial supports (PSS) to and ensuring social and emotional learning of secondary school learners.

It is important to clarify relevant terminologies and approaches relating to psychosocial well-being and SEL in education in crisis affected contexts, and to explore how PSS and SEL relate to one another. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) views SEL as an important component of PSS that educators can and should address, since it is a practice easily and often employed in educational settings and one that contributes to children’s and youths’ improved psychosocial wellbeing. It is a pedagogical practice and process that is especially fitting in both formal and non formal educational environments, since it promotes the skills and abilities that help children, young people, and adults learn [2].

By PSS we understand a process of facilitating resilience, actions promoting the holistic wellbeing of people in their social world. PSS aims to help individuals recover after a crisis has disrupted their lives and to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events.

‘Resilience’ appeared to be another important concept in SEL. It is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands [3]. Children are known to be remarkably resilient. SEL has been shown to mitigate the effects of adversity, by providing children with the tools to focus, regulate their emotional responses, interact with others, and cope



with stress and challenges [4]. Resilience depends on coping mechanisms and life skills, such as problem-solving, the ability to seek support, motivation, optimism, faith, perseverance, and resourcefulness. Resilience occurs when protective factors that support wellbeing are stronger than risk factors that cause harm. It has also been found to rebuild or build for the first time healthy brain structure and neurological connections. Long-term benefits of SEL include improved academic performance, pro-social skills, positive self-image, and decreased aggression, emotional distress and conduct problems [5]. Notably, individual resilience is often boosted by community support, including interactions with peers, family, teachers, community leaders, and so on [6].

Wellbeing is defined as a condition of holistic health and the process of achieving this condition. It refers to physical, emotional, social, and cognitive health. Wellbeing includes everything what is good for a person like having a meaningful social role; feeling happy and hopeful; living according to good values, as defined by the local communities; having positive social relations and a supportive environment; coping with challenges through positive life skills; and having security, protection, and access to quality services.

Activities that promote PSS and SEL can contribute to resilience by promoting the core competencies that support wellbeing and learning outcomes. The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) approach to integrate SEL in education and protection programs comprises 5 specific competencies:

1. **Brain Building.** The set of skills that helps us focus our attention, remember instructions and concepts, manage impulses, successfully juggle multiple tasks, and organize steps and information logically.

2. **Emotion Regulation.** The set of skills that allows us to understand our own emotions and manage our feelings in a positive manner.

3. **Positive Social Skills.** The set of skills that allows us to relate to one another in a positive way by understanding others' feelings and behaviour, and responding in a way that reduces conflict and promotes positive social interaction.

4. **Conflict Resolution.** The set of skills that helps us address any problems and conflicts in a positive manner, as they arise.

5. **Perseverance.** The set of skills that allows us to push through challenges and continue to work towards a realistic goal.

The vast stock of literature on SEL underlines the importance of integrating throughout the curriculum and making it a part of every SEL lesson yet another element, the 'mindfulness'. It is the intentional state of being aware and focused on the present moment and accepting reality. Mindfulness can teach concentration, self-awareness and emotion regulation. The purpose of any SEL intervention is to make children understand the benefits of mindfulness for reducing feelings of anxiety and stress, focusing their attention, and learning to persevere through hardship.

Research suggests that SEL is most effective when it is taught through direct instruction in a safe and caring learning environment. When teachers create an environment where students feel welcomed and included, students are more motivated and likely to engage [7]. Teachers need to create classrooms that are zone of peace and safe place for all to be, to grow and to learn. Providing opportunities for



learners to practice the SEL skills through recreational games, and reinforcing these competencies through caregiver involvement has also proven effective [5]. EFL teachers as SEL educators should perform different roles of a facilitator, a learner, a model, but initially they have to be aware of their own well-being needs and be able to identify these needs and ambitions as a personality and educator in order to apply self-care and well-being practices. Effective SEL programs can benefit teacher well-being, lead to stronger teacher-student connectedness, and enhance teachers' use of student-centered pedagogies. In addition, research shows that teacher self-efficacy is positively related to work engagement and job satisfaction and negatively related to burnout [8]. Therefore, it is important for teachers to engage in activities that promote their own well-being and resilience.

### Summary and conclusions.

EFL trainee teachers would be ready to provide social and emotional support to secondary school learners having themselves developed competences that support wellbeing and learning outcomes and being aware of key terminology in SEL, of such notions as psychological trauma, stress and its types, mindfulness, resilience, well-being and the ways to ensure them in their learners in a safe and caring learning environment through strategies for integration of SEL content into the process of EFL teaching and learning. The indicative content like this should become a part of teacher training programmes and could be either incorporated by the EFL Methodology course or be taught as separate one.

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Article sent: 15.10.2023

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