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**The Role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Enhancing Collaboration and
Communication Skills in Face-to-Face EFL Classrooms for Adolescent Students**

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Introduction

In contemporary education, there is a noticeable disjunction between academic learning and other forms of learning. This often results in a curriculum divided neatly into distinct subjects that rarely intertwine, affecting students' ability to integrate knowledge into their lives. Consequently, subjects such as maths, language, science, and English are often considered fundamentally different from emotional education, for instance. This separation hinders the promotion of a holistic and comprehensive education, leading to a reductionist approach that neglects the interconnectedness of different learning experiences.

Sir Ken Robinson (2015) raises a critical and thought-provoking question: “What is education for?”. As he acknowledges, there is no single answer, since education is one of the most complex fields, marked by great diversity within and across its systems. According to Robinson (2015):

Education systems consist of numerous interest groups: students, parents, educators, employers, professional and commercial organisations, publishers, politicians, and on and on. There are multiple systems within the system, which constantly interact with each other. They include social services, counselling and psychological services, health care, and examinations and testing agencies. They all have their own special interests, which may overlap or conflict and affect each other with varying degrees of influence. (pp. 64-65)

In a world developing at such a rapid pace, there is no doubt that education is key, as it prepares students to live their lives to the fullest. However, how can this be achieved through education? What does it imply? What should teachers focus on? What should students learn, and how? These questions have been posed throughout history and do not have a single answer. Nonetheless, one point of agreement today may be that traditional academic skills alone are insufficient to prepare students for changing contexts and that other abilities should also be cultivated and promoted.

According to research, education should be viewed as a living, complex, diverse, and dynamic process that leaves a lasting impact on all involved. From this perspective, it goes beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to include the development of dispositions to feel. As Kaplan (2022) notes, school experiences can transform students' sense of identity, influencing their self-esteem positively or negatively. Therefore, teaching requires teachers to engage both intellectually and emotionally, balancing knowledge transmission with an affectionate and sensitive approach. Without this balance, education loses part of its humanising power and its potential positive impact diminishes. This view provides the basis for exploring Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in EFL classrooms among adolescent students.

Teaching adolescents poses considerable challenges. Adolescence is a critical stage of development during which teenagers face not only biological, psychological, and physical changes but also new academic demands. It is a period of transformation and, at the same time, a window of opportunity for both teachers and students. Having long been interested in adolescent education but aware of the breadth of the field, I decided to focus this thesis on the role of Social and Emotional Learning in enhancing communication and collaboration skills among adolescent students in the EFL classroom. Despite the growing recognition of SEL in educational discourse, its integration into EFL teaching for adolescents remains underexplored. This research, therefore, seeks to address the gap and, thus, represents an important contribution to EFL pedagogy and a relevant study within today's educational context.

When I speak of Social and Emotional Learning, I refer to what CASEL defines as:

An integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, n.d., para. 1)

Firstly, a brief explanation of what SEL encompasses and its impact should be provided to understand its significance in academic, professional and personal growth. According to CASEL, SEL concentrates on five interconnected domains: self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; responsible decision-making; and relationship skills (CASEL, n.d.). Daniel Goleman (1995), considered a pioneer in emotional intelligence, offers a psychological perspective on these skills, classifying them as follows: knowing one's emotions; managing emotions; motivating oneself; recognizing emotions in others; and, finally, handling relationships (Goleman, 1995). Jones and Doolittle (2017) also contribute complementary perspectives by identifying additional skills relevant to SEL. To enrich this overview, Berg et al.'s report *Identifying, Defining, and Measuring Social and Emotional Competencies* was also consulted, since it critically analyses existing frameworks and highlights areas for improvement.

In addition, references are made to current scientific research supporting the inclusion of SEL in education. Among the authors cited throughout this paper are Cipriano et al. (2023), Durlak et al. (2011, 2022), Greenberg et al. (2023), Jones, and Taylor et al. (2017). International institutions such as UNESCO (2020), The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development (2019), and the European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2018) are also considered. While meta-analyses provide broad overviews, these reports supplement them with more detailed insights. Overall, the evidence demonstrates that SEL integration fosters not only academic achievement but also comprehensive student development, while identifying challenges and areas for further research.

Secondly, it is necessary to explore adolescence and its possible connection with Social and Emotional Learning. For the description of the former, the thesis resorts to the following authors: Crone and Dahl (2012) for their explanations of what this phase of life involves, including the physical, cognitive and psychological changes; Immordino-Yang (2019) and Cantor et al. (2019) for their account of how the adolescent brain develops and,

thus, becomes more malleable and prone to change; Guerrero (2020), for her examination of adolescence and her presentation of interesting variables that affect it nowadays; Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016), for their general comments on adolescence and adolescent students; and, last but not least, UNICEF (2019; 2022) for its analysis of this phase in Argentina, which enriches this paper and further delimits its scope by bringing it to the national level. In order to draw connections between this period of life and Social and Emotional Learning, Taylor et al. (2017), Bisquerra (2012), Goleman (1995) and Yeager (2017) were considered.

As regards the field in which the following analysis is inscribed, namely that of EFL pedagogy, there are several authors who contributed to the definition of key concepts that are also dealt with throughout this paper. Although some of them work primarily within English-as-a-second-language contexts, their theoretical insights are equally applicable to EFL settings, as the underlying pedagogical principles and affective processes are shared across both modalities. For instance, in order to define and describe what an English as a foreign language classroom is, two main authors were taken into account. First, Henry Douglas Brown (2007), who is an emeritus professor of English as a Second Language and former president of the International TESOL. Second, Lynn Cameron (2001), whose description of EFL Classrooms was also highly significant for this paper.

In relation to the feelings and challenges that may emerge during EFL classes, not only these already mentioned authors were cited, but also Fletcher (2000), who indicated that, in these contexts, frustration and anxiety may be perceived and should be overcome with the help of the EFL teacher. What is more, in order to establish a more specific connection between SEL and EFL learning, attention was given to the studies of Andrienko et al. (2020) and Maqbool (2019) who did research on the relation between emotional intelligence and certain EFL skills. Through their studies, the first concluded that there was a strong connection between Emotional Intelligence and the development of English-as-a-second language oral communication skills. The second also demonstrated the positive correlation between emotional intelligence and English academic learning.

In addition to this, it should also be noted that the analysis of the potential interrelationships between SEL and the pedagogy of EFL gave rise to several inquiries: What SEL strategies could EFL teachers benefit from? How could these strategies be implemented? How could SEL help teachers acquire deeper insights into their adolescent students? On which domain should teachers concentrate?

As it was already shown, SEL and its different skills could be classified differently according to the framework applied. Taking into consideration CASEL's one, it could be claimed that the present research focuses on relationship skills, specifically on communication and collaboration skills since these are necessary to the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language. In the context of an EFL classroom, the teaching and learning of a language that adolescents do not use outside the classroom setting renders communication a vital element. Moreover, for EFL teachers, the teaching of adolescents also entails fostering a sense of belonging by leveraging the prosocial behaviour that characterises this maturation period. Consequently, the promotion of collaboration skills could also be advantageous for the entire class.

As a matter of fact, these two relationship skills could be considered part and parcel of 21st century education (UNESCO, 2020) since they are essential elements for both personal and professional success. Thus, it is not surprising that these skills are being included and fostered by well-known EFL institutions such as Cambridge, Oxford (Mercer et al., 2020) and Pearson. However, it should be noticed that communication and collaboration are promoted in this field not only because of these extremely relevant reasons, but also because of their key role in EFL learning in particular. To illustrate the connection between the former and the latter, several renowned didactics specialists are cited. Jeremy Harmer (2015), for instance, analyses the relationship between communication and language, while Diane Larsen-Freeman (2000) explores how these elements interact and proposes methodologies through which they can be fostered. She also identifies the conditions required to strengthen these skills. It should be noted, however, that both authors generally refer to

Communicative Language Teaching as an approach to language instruction. Nonetheless, they also examine the broader relevance of communication for English language learning, which makes their perspectives particularly significant for this paper. Moreover, both highlight the role of collaboration in this process.

Additionally, Dobao (2014), Zambrana (2020) and Cervantes et al. (2012) are referenced for their pieces of research that examined the possible connections between communication, collaboration and EFL learning. Dobao (2014), for example, analysed the possibilities that pair and small group interaction offer for collaborative dialogue and second language (L2) vocabulary learning. Zambrana (2020) concluded that both the natural and social environments are essential to make interaction possible and it is this aspect that will boost learning, which highlights the relevance of collaboration during the learning process. Cervantes et al. (2012) also studied the effect of collaboration in EFL learning and their conclusions, though different from Zambrana (2020), were also enriching for this paper.

In his book, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (Brown, 2014), Brown explores the affective domain and enumerates the different personality factors in human behaviour and how they relate to second language acquisition. His insights regarding what may occur among students and teachers during the learning process and while communicating and collaborating, serve to show how Social and Emotional Learning may contribute to enhancing these skills.

As regards the potential role of SEL in the enhancement of communication and collaboration skills in the EFL classrooms, several authors are cited. Cipriano et al. (2023), Schwartz et al. (2025), Dusenbury et al. (2015), NC-SEAD (2019) and Yoder et al. (2021), who are SEL researchers, highlight the relevance of building supportive and affirming learning environments where SEL could be fostered. What is more, they also underscore the symbiosis that exists between SEL and these kinds of environments. In other words, for these authors, by developing social and emotional skills, the learning environment could also be improved and become more supportive and friendlier. With the aim of accounting for the

connection between this approach to promote SEL and EFL learning, Brown (2014) is cited. This author, who, as it was already commented on, is a relevant figure in the EFL field, believes that a climate of acceptance is extremely relevant so that students feel self-confident and secure enough to participate in the class and to be willing to explore the target language.

Regarding the aspects that should be considered in order to build a supportive and affirming learning environment through which SEL could enhance communication and collaboration in the EFL classrooms and with adolescent students in particular, a wide variety of authors are consulted. While not all of them could be regarded as purely SEL promoters, either because they are not contemporary with SEL or because their work cannot be circumscribed to it, their ideas and suggestions could be implemented through SEL and enhance these relational skills. In relation to SEL researchers, Yoder et al. (2021) explores four different practices that could promote these types of environments, focusing on: warmth and support, responsibility and choice, problem solving and language. Hufford (2014) analyses the same topic from a philosophical point of view and introduces the term of teachers' presence which, for him, is of utmost importance in order to have a communion in the classroom. Cossini and Ballini (2023) also reflect on the key function that the environment has in the learning process and emphasise the significance of the tangible and intangible components that compose it. In relation to these elements, McGinty et al. (2013) are also cited since they enrich these ideas further. What is more, Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) and Guerrero (2020), which have already been mentioned, are also referenced since they specifically analyse how to build a friendly classroom environment for adolescent students.

It has already been mentioned that, in order to integrate SEL into academic learning, close attention should be given to communication. As a matter of fact, it should be claimed that, actually, both verbal and non-verbal interaction should be addressed. Martikainen (2019), Mehrabian (1972; 1971), Najarzaghan (2014) and Halonen (2002) are utilised to show the essential role that these play not only in the classroom but also in life. Moreover,

these authors also suggest different strategies and techniques that would allow teachers to be aware of their verbal and non-verbal communication and improve them.

As established above, the aim of this thesis is to examine the role that SEL could play in the enhancement of communication and collaboration skills in the EFL classroom among adolescent students. Having been demonstrated above, a wide variety of authors were consulted as their contributions serve to draw strong connections between the different key aspects of this paper. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that in order to develop these skills in the EFL classroom there is a crucial figure that should also be contemplated even when it is not part of the title: that of the teacher, since without this professional none of this could be achieved. For this reason, Schonert-Reichl (2017); Bisquerra (2012); Jones et al. (2013); Williams et al. (2024) and Osher et al. (2020) are referenced as their analysis of the teachers' role in the promotion of Social and Emotional Learning results vital to understand why they should also be taken into account and prepared during its implementation in the classroom. In addition, they also examine how teachers' SEL could be improved and give different practical suggestions on how to do so. Moreover, in order to explore this matter more in depth and illustrate the significance that teachers, their own well-being and, thus, their own social and emotional skills have in the classroom Oberle et al. (2020) are cited. These authors studied how teachers' burn-out, stress and general well-being affect classroom dynamics and also students' behaviour and performance.

Building on the discussion above, this thesis also attempts to provide teachers with practical ideas to include in their lesson plans and through which they could fulfil the aim of enhancing communication and collaboration. It should be noted that even though the activities and strategies suggested in this paper could boost SEL and the previously mentioned relationship skills, not all of them fall strictly within the scope of SEL or the EFL field. Indeed, some of the authors referenced come from the field of psychology, such as Seligman et al. (2009; 2010) and Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016), or brain-compatible learning and neuropsychology, for instance Prat Gay (2017) or Stein (2018). Other authors

of high significance that study SEL and illustrate how this could be applied in different contexts are Yoder et al. (2021). Hufford (2014) is also considered since he analyses the traits that teachers should take into account in order to foster a sense of community and belonging in the classroom. Rosenberg's (2013) and Najarzagdegan's (2014) contributions are also relevant as they delve into the practical aspects that would improve teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication.

In the Argentine context, Anijovich and Cappelletti (2020) and Cossini and Ballini (2023) offer a pedagogical perspective that complements SEL principles. Their emphasis on reflective teaching practices, formative assessment, and the creation of meaningful learning experiences aligns with the notion of a supportive and emotionally attuned classroom climate. These practices, when combined with SEL-informed strategies, can promote autonomy, empathy, and collaboration among adolescent learners.

Finally, to illustrate how these theoretical insights can be translated into everyday classroom practice, practical resources such as *Games Galore* (Monté & Carbonell, 2018; Pryde et. al, n.d.), as well as activity-based handbooks and presentations such as those by Graciela Bertolini and María Barberis, are also considered. These materials provide examples of interactive dynamics and games that not only foster engagement but also encourage communication, collaboration, and emotional connection among students — key aims of this research.

Given the nature of its inquiry, which aims to interpret and integrate theoretical perspectives rather than to measure variables, this thesis adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and documentary approach. In line with Hernández Sampieri et al. (2014), such research is characterized by a flexible inquiry process that “moves between the answers and the development of theory” (p. 9). Following Mercado (2007), it is descriptive because it seeks to present the characteristics of the phenomena under study, and documentary since it relies on secondary sources to support the analysis.

This study encompasses a comprehensive review of relevant academic and scientific articles and books to analyse the role of SEL in enhancing communication and collaboration skills among adolescent students. In addition to investigating the significance and relation of SEL, EFL classrooms, and communication and collaboration skills in this context, this study contributes to the design of English as foreign language classes that consciously and explicitly take all this into account. For this reason, this paper not only considers how teachers can fulfil their teaching role while promoting these relational skills in the classroom but also suggests practical strategies that could be applied in the EFL classroom. The ultimate aim is to enable students to connect with learning and, even more importantly, with others.

The first chapter of this work gives a detailed introduction of Social and Emotional Learning and its main features. It delves into the different frameworks through which this could be promoted and thoroughly presents the available research literature and its main authors. Additionally, it explores the different connections between this subject matter (SEL) and adolescence in the Argentine context, EFL classrooms and communication and collaboration in these instances, which are key thematic areas in this paper.

The second chapter examines all the information already introduced in part one from a critical point of view. It has already been mentioned that this is a literature-based thesis, for this reason, it aims to draw the attention to the gaps in existing research and, thus, underscore the caveats that should be considered in relation to SEL and the possible limitations that this could have nowadays, especially in EFL classrooms. This would be of high significance since it would show that while SEL shows promising and ground-breaking results, in practice there is still a lot to improve.

The third chapter proceeds to analyse the potential role that SEL may play in the enhancement of communication and collaboration skills in the EFL classrooms. With the aim of studying this matter thoroughly, it would reconsider what having adolescent students in the EFL classrooms may be like and it would also highlight what this would imply for EFL

teachers. As a matter of fact, EFL teachers' roles in the promotion of these skills would also be addressed since, without them, none of this would be possible.

Lastly, the final chapter intends to propose practical ideas that could be implemented in the classroom and, as a result, be consciously included in EFL teachers' lesson plans. In order to facilitate its reading, a wide variety of activities, strategies, dynamics and tips are provided in bullet point format.

It is also worth noticing that, throughout this thesis, with the purpose of simplifying and complementing the researched information, charts that serve to summarise the main ideas explored are included. What is more, extra resources and materials are added through different appendixes. These would not only supplement or illustrate what is being examined, but it would also allow the reader to expand their knowledge on certain aspects that were mentioned but could not be fully covered in this paper.

Chapter One

An Introduction to Social and Emotional Learning and its Connection with Adolescence, EFL Classrooms and Communication and Collaboration Skills

Social and Emotional Learning is also known by other terms such as *social and emotional education, personal and social education/ development, emotional education* (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2018). According to CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), it is defined as:

An integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (n.d., para. 1)

Immordino-Yang (2019) highlights that prioritising SEL and creating supportive contexts for its development contributes significantly to students' social, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as to academic achievement and cognitive functioning. This underscores the importance of integrating SEL within educational settings, including English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms.

EFL refers specifically to the instruction of English in countries where the language is not dominant, as is the case in Argentina (Brown, 2001). Cameron (2001) argues that the effectiveness of foreign language learning largely depends on the quantity and quality of exposure to the target language. Consequently, EFL classrooms play a pivotal role, since students have limited opportunities to use English outside these environments. As Brown (2001) notes, students' engagement with the language is mostly restricted to the classroom, with minimal exposure beyond teaching hours. Because the classroom is often the primary

— and sometimes the only — space where students actively use the language, the emotional climate and interpersonal dynamics of this environment become particularly significant. Thus, EFL classrooms are not merely spaces for linguistic practice but also social environments where students negotiate meaning, take risks, and collaborate. Integrating SEL in such contexts can enhance students' confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate, thereby maximising the limited opportunities available for meaningful language use.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce SEL and its relevance in EFL classrooms, especially for adolescent students and for the development of communication and collaboration skills. To this end, the chapter is organised into sections. First, it outlines the main features of SEL, its frameworks, and supporting research. Second, it analyses SEL in relation to adolescence in the Argentine context. Third, it considers SEL in the EFL classroom. Finally, it explores the relationship between SEL and communication and collaboration among adolescent students in EFL learning.

SEL and Some of its Main Frameworks

To impart social and emotional competencies in the EFL classroom, SEL can be structured using various frameworks, with CASEL's model being one of the most widely applied. CASEL identifies five interconnected domains:

- Self-awareness: understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and recognising how they influence behaviour across contexts;
- Self-management: effectively regulating emotions, thoughts, and behaviours to achieve goals in diverse situations;
- Social awareness: understanding and empathising with others, including people from different backgrounds and cultures;
- Relationship skills: establishing and maintaining positive and healthy relationships, resisting negative social pressure, and managing conflict constructively;

- Responsible decision-making: making thoughtful, ethical choices regarding personal behaviour and social interactions.

Goleman (1995) and Salovey (Bisquerra, 2012) also propose a framework, though they use the term emotional intelligence rather than SEL. Their model includes:

- Knowing one's emotions (self-awareness, recognising a feeling as it occurs);
- Managing emotions (the ability to regulate emotions appropriately);
- Motivating oneself (essential for attention, self-motivation, mastery, and creativity);
- Recognising emotions in others (empathy);
- Handling relationships (managing emotions in others).

Stephanie Jones and colleagues initially divided SEL competencies into three groups: emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Later, they added character skills and mindset skills to encompass additional dimensions (Cipriano et al., 2023). These are described as follows:

- Emotional Processes: The ability to recognise, express, and regulate one's own emotions and understand the emotions of others;
- Social/ Interpersonal Skills: The ability to accurately interpret others' behaviour, effectively navigate social situations, and interact positively with peers and adults;
- Cognitive Regulation: The ability to focus attention, plan, solve problems, coordinate behaviour, make decisions, and override a preferred response for a more appropriate one;
- Character Skills: Personal values and ethical decision-making that guide behaviour in social contexts;
- Mindset Skills: Beliefs and attitudes that influence how individuals approach challenges and learning.

When considering the various frameworks for implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), it is important to recognise the diversity in approaches and outcomes. As

Jones and Doolittle (2017, p. 6) observe, different conceptual frameworks “can lead to different research questions, different intervention approaches, and different choices for measurement in evaluation”. This variety suggests that effectiveness depends on context, participants, and implementation conditions. Cipriano et al. (2023) further argue that the specific skills taught in a SEL intervention influence outcomes differently. Despite such challenges, the benefits of SEL are undeniable. Mehta (2020, p. 1) stresses that SEL “must become part of the fabric of how all adults and children relate to one another in a school”. To support this claim, the following section examines the scientific research supporting SEL.

Scientific Research Findings that Support Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

In recent years, the implementation of SEL programmes has grown steadily (Cossini & Ballini, 2023). Although further research and evaluation are still needed (Greenberg, 2023), most evidence shows that SEL interventions produce positive outcomes, confirming that social and emotional skills can be taught and developed in appropriate contexts (Aspen Institute, 2019). The aim of this section is to present the main scientific evidence supporting SEL and to highlight its impact.

Jones and Doolittle (2017, p. 5) emphasise that “to say Social and Emotional Learning implies that these competencies can be learned and nurtured”. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) stresses that SEL promotes active learning approaches, enabling students to transfer skills across different subjects and contexts, particularly when they have opportunities to practise them. This perspective suggests that SEL can be integrated into school curricula not as an isolated component, but as a pedagogical tool adaptable to various subjects. It also reinforces that SEL enhances both academic engagement and emotional development (Bisquerra, 2012). This is particularly important, as it underscores that SEL extends beyond the mere enhancement of emotional literacy, focusing instead on fostering comprehensive emotional growth — a view further supported by Bisquerra (2012).

While active learning is a fundamental aspect of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), as it enables youth to apply social and emotional skills in practice, additional components of SEL programmes also contribute to the overall effectiveness of these interventions. These are summarised in the acronym SAFE: **Sequenced, Active, Focused,** and **Explicit** practices. Durlak et al. (2011) found that programmes meeting SAFE criteria produced stronger positive effects than those that did not. Specifically, these showed improvements in SEL skills, attitudes, social behaviour, emotional well-being, and academic performance, whereas those without SAFE elements had more limited results. Cipriano et al. (2023) confirmed this finding, noting that sequenced programmes that first build intrapersonal skills and then interpersonal skills are particularly effective.

The evidence base is robust. A meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programmes with more than 270,000 students demonstrated improvements in SEL skills, attitudes, and social behaviours, as well as reductions in conduct problems and emotional distress. Academic performance also improved. Importantly, follow-up data showed that positive effects remained significant for at least six months after the interventions, although their magnitude decreased over time (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition to this, the authors concluded that teachers and school staff could conduct successful SEL programmes (Durlak et al., 2011), which underscores the key role that educators play in the promotion of social and emotional skills.

A subsequent meta-analysis of 82 SEL interventions, including almost 100,000 students, extended these findings. Taylor et al. (2017) reported gains in SEL skills, attitudes, academic performance, and emotional well-being, and noted reductions in drug use. Interestingly, they did not find consistent improvements in social behaviour or conduct problems. Crucially, however, Taylor and colleagues showed that SEL effects lasted well beyond the programme period: participants maintained benefits in attitudes, skills, prosocial behaviour, and academic achievement up to nearly four years later. These results highlight both the preventive and long-term protective effects of SEL, such as stronger social

relationships, higher graduation and college attendance rates, and lower risks of negative outcomes like arrests or mental health disorders.

Regarding how SEL strategies affect students from different racial groups and socioeconomic statuses at follow-up, it is also worth noting the results of this meta-analysis. According to Taylor et al. (2017), positive effects for SEL programme participants were found across all demographic subgroups. In other words, the impact of SEL did not vary greatly according to the student's race or socioeconomic class. This preliminary conclusion is of great importance, as it implies that, hopefully, SEL could reach and benefit a large and diverse proportion of students.

Another review of 12 meta-analyses covering SEL programmes from early childhood through high school found positive results in 44 out of 45 categories, including improvements in personal and social skills, positive attitudes, classroom behaviour, and academic achievement, as well as reductions in emotional distress and substance use (Durlak et al., 2022). Greenberg (2023) also confirms that teacher-led SEL programmes not only strengthen competencies and relationships but also increase student engagement and improve classroom climate. The Aspen Institute (2019) and UNESCO (2020) similarly argue that schools are uniquely positioned to address social and emotional needs, reducing problems such as bullying, aggression, and withdrawal.

A recent meta-analysis by Cipriano et al. (2023) further reinforces these findings, showing that SEL interventions improve school climate, civic attitudes, peer relationships, prosocial behaviours, emotional well-being, and academic outcomes. Moreover, they found that the sequencing of skills — teaching intrapersonal competencies before interpersonal ones — enhances programme effectiveness.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that SEL has significant, lasting benefits for students' emotional, social, and academic development. At the same time, they underline

the importance of well-designed, evidence-based interventions that are sequenced, active, focused, and explicit, and that take into account contextual and demographic factors.

Table 1: Scientific Support for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Description: This table captures the key findings and sources related to SEL's role, effectiveness, and broad impact on students across academic, emotional, and behavioural dimensions.

Main Findings	Source
SEL competencies are teachable and support academic + emotional growth across subjects.	Jones & Doolittle (2017); UNESCO (2020); Bisquerra (2012)
Active, sequenced, focused, and explicit (SAFE) practices increase programme effectiveness and positive outcomes.	Durlak et al. (2011); Cipriano et al. (2023)
School-based SEL programmes improve skills, attitudes, behaviours, and academic performance, with effects lasting at least six months.	Durlak et al. (2011)
SEL benefits are long-lasting, fostering well-being, protective factors, and reducing negative behaviours.	Taylor et al. (2017)

Programmes are effective across diverse groups and can be led by teachers and staff. Durlak et al. (2011); Taylor et al. (2017); Greenberg (2023)

Schools provide ideal contexts for SEL, addressing challenges like bullying and aggression. Aspen Institute (2019); UNESCO (2020)

Meta-analyses show SEL enhances school climate, prosocial behaviour, and educational outcomes. Cipriano et al. (2023)

Sequencing intrapersonal skills before interpersonal skills strengthens impact. Cipriano et al. (2023)

The Significance of SEL in Adolescence and among Argentine Adolescent Students

While empirical evidence confirms the general benefits of SEL across educational settings, adolescence represents a particularly critical period for its implementation. The following section therefore examines the developmental and contextual reasons why SEL is especially significant during this life stage.

Adolescence is a key developmental stage that requires special attention from educators, families, and policymakers. During this period, young people undergo profound physical, psychological, and emotional changes while simultaneously shaping their identities and social relationships. As a result, adolescence presents unique challenges, but it also offers significant opportunities for growth.

Crone and Dahl (2012) note that adolescents are drawn to explore new peer groups and to seek belonging, acceptance, and romantic connections, gradually shifting from self-

centred behaviour towards prosocial attitudes. Since adolescents' decisions and values are strongly shaped by their social environment, this developmental period offers fertile ground for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Scientific evidence reinforces the importance of focusing on SEL at this stage. Immordino-Yang (2019) describes adolescence as a period of significant brain development, especially within the frontal lobes, which underpin self-regulation, comprehension, and behavioural control. Cantor et al. (2019) add that this growth is highly sensitive to environmental and interpersonal influences. Consequently, well-designed experiences that nurture social and emotional competencies — such as strengthening relationships, solving problems, and taking others' perspectives — can positively shape brain function and foster long-term wellbeing (Immordino-Yang, 2019). Thus, SEL does not merely respond to adolescents' immediate needs but also supports the neurological foundations of their learning and development.

Overall, adolescence should therefore be recognised as a window of opportunity for cultivating resilience, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Complementing this view, UNESCO (2020) emphasises the importance of SEL in equipping students to regulate emotions, make responsible decisions, and build healthy relationships.

This broader perspective becomes particularly pressing in the Argentine context. As in many other countries, adolescents in Argentina face multiple pressures associated with academic demands, peer relationships, and wider social contexts. Levels of anxiety and school disengagement among secondary school students may be linked to the absence of structured emotional education. Indeed, UNICEF (2022) reports that stress, depression, and risk behaviours have been on the rise among Argentine adolescents, while suicide remains the second leading cause of death from external factors in this age group (UNICEF, 2019). Contributing factors include the absence of meaningful support networks, difficulties in navigating the transition to adulthood, and untreated mental health issues. Furthermore, socio-economic inequality exacerbates these difficulties, as vulnerable students may experience additional barriers that hinder their academic and personal growth. In this context,

the incorporation of SEL in schools is not a luxury but a necessity. For Argentine students in particular, who often face limited access to extracurricular support, the school becomes the main environment in which SEL competencies can be acquired and practised.

The urgency of addressing these challenges is reflected in educational policy at both national and international levels. The Ley de Educación Nacional (2006) explicitly recognises the integral formation of students, including emotional and social aspects, as a central objective of schooling. Likewise, programmes such as Educación Sexual Integral (ESI) aim to promote respect, empathy, and critical thinking, though implementation remains uneven across provinces. At the global level, UNESCO (2020) and Mercer et al. (2020) frame social and emotional competencies as “mastery skills” and global competencies required for effective participation in a rapidly changing 21st-century society. Strengthening SEL in Argentina, therefore, is not only consistent with national priorities but also aligned with broader educational goals worldwide.

The benefits of SEL are particularly visible at the classroom level as well, where its impact becomes concrete. Research shows that students equipped with social and emotional skills are more likely to feel supported, motivated, and engaged in learning (Yeager, 2017). Such skills foster safe and collaborative environments, which are especially relevant in the EFL classroom. By promoting self-esteem (Brown, 2000), enhancing flow (Goleman, 1995), and encouraging positive outlooks (Seligman, 2010), SEL helps students overcome self-limiting beliefs and participate more confidently in language learning.

Beyond the classroom, SEL has been shown to reduce risky behaviours and impulsivity while fostering resilience and realistic aspirations (Taylor et al., 2017; Bisquerra, 2012). In this way, its benefits extend from academic success to broader personal and social development.

All in all, these considerations highlight both the promise and the challenge of implementing SEL with adolescents. While demanding, such efforts directly address their

developmental task of achieving mature social competence (Crone & Dahl, 2012). As Yeager (2017) observes, SEL enables young people to thrive with less stress, better health, and a stronger love of learning. Moreover, when students feel respected by peers and valued by adults, its impact is magnified. By embedding SEL in schools, educators can help prevent bullying, violence, and dropout while also fostering collaboration, civic engagement, and resilience. For these reasons, promoting SEL among Argentine adolescents is both timely and essential, making it a central focus of this thesis.

Table 2: The Significance of SEL in Adolescence and among Argentine Adolescent students

Description: This table outlines the potential benefits of integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into the educational experiences of adolescents.

SEL Benefit	Description
Holistic Education	Complements academics with broader personal and social development.
Engagement & Healthy Growth	Supportive relationships and structured experiences increase engagement and well-being.
Emotional & Social Skills	Builds regulation, empathy, conflict resolution, and ethical decision-making.
Brain Development	Strengthens self-regulation, comprehension, and behavioural responses during adolescence.

Social Competence	Encourages positive, respectful interactions and supportive classroom environments.
Academic & Cognitive Gains	Improves attention, memory, and decision-making for learning adaptability.
Risk Prevention	Reduces stress, impulsivity, risky behaviours, violence, and mental health challenges.
Resilience	Develops coping skills to face challenges and resist negative influences.
Self-Esteem & Future Goals	Boosts confidence and realistic goal-setting for personal and social growth.
Mastery Skills	Provides lifelong competencies for relationships, work, and personal success.
21st-Century Preparedness	Equips students with global skills for responsible citizenship.
Stress Reduction & Love of Learning	Promotes well-being, lower stress, and lasting motivation to learn.

The Imperative of SEL in the EFL classrooms

When thinking of a classroom, many imagine four walls and a door where formal learning takes place. Yet EFL classrooms go far beyond that definition. They are

opportunities to learn, spark creativity, build trust, and foster self-confidence. They are not only physical spaces but also environments where students and teachers face challenges, insecurities, frustration, and surprise. Within them, learners of all kinds converge: eager students, reluctant ones, those attending out of obligation, and those who enjoy English but lack self-confidence. At their own pace, all of them immerse themselves in a foreign language and experience a wide range of sensations, thoughts, and emotions. In short, EFL classrooms are places of encounter where people with diverse personalities, needs, fears, and motivations meet and share.

This diversity highlights the strong connection between Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and its relevance in EFL settings. Language learning is inherently social, requiring communication, interaction, and cultural understanding (Harmer, 2015). As Brown (2000) states, second language learners must be receptive to the people they communicate with, to the language itself, and to the context of communication, placing value on interpersonal exchange. SEL strengthens these processes by developing empathy, cooperation, emotional regulation, and other skills essential for effective communication. Studies support this connection: Dastgoshadeh and Javanmardi (2021) found significant correlations between emotional intelligence (EI) and willingness to communicate (WTC) among EFL learners, confirming the benefits of integrating SEL into language instruction.

Among the many challenges in EFL classrooms, motivation is particularly demanding. Brown (2001) observes that students often struggle to see the relevance of learning English, which may lead to disengagement — especially when classroom hours are their only exposure to the language. SEL offers a valuable approach to sustaining motivation, as it promotes students' self-efficacy, self-regulation, and positive self-concept. It also equips them with tools to manage frustration and reduce anxiety, common obstacles in language learning (Fletcher, 2000). Research has shown that including emotional content in lessons not only supports oral communication skills but also increases learners' interest, participation, and motivation (Andrienko et al., 2020). Similarly, Maqbool (2019) reports a

positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic success among master's-level EFL students.

In addition to strengthening motivation, SEL fosters key relationship skills and interpersonal competencies that directly enhance communicative competence. Active listening supports comprehension, perspective-taking nurtures intercultural understanding, and conflict resolution encourages collaboration — all of which foster more engaged, cooperative, and motivated learners.

Finally, SEL benefits teachers as well. It provides strategies to manage classroom dynamics, redirect disruptive behaviours constructively, and monitor classroom climate to maintain engagement. Beyond instruction, it supports teachers' own socio-emotional competencies, contributing to their well-being and helping to reduce stress and negative work-related emotions (Jones & Jacob, 2014; UNESCO, 2020).

In sum, integrating Social and Emotional Learning into EFL classrooms is not a mere pedagogical choice but an imperative, particularly when working with adolescent students. At this stage of development, emotions, social relationships, and identity formation profoundly influence learning processes and classroom engagement. Since language learning is inherently social and emotionally charged, SEL becomes a crucial complement, equipping adolescents with the emotional and interpersonal skills that foster communication, collaboration, and resilience. Moreover, by enhancing motivation, empathy, and self-regulation, SEL helps create supportive environments where learners can express themselves confidently and manage the challenges of acquiring a new language. Its impact also extends to teachers, who benefit from more positive classroom dynamics and improved well-being. In this sense, this thesis aims to examine in depth the relevance of SEL in EFL classrooms, highlighting its potential to enrich both teaching practices and students' educational experiences.

Table 3: Benefits of SEL in EFL Classrooms

Description: This table summarises the key benefits of integrating SEL in EFL classrooms for students, teachers, and the learning environment.

Stakeholder	Benefit	Description
Students	Improved Emotional Regulation	Students develop better coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety.
	Enhanced Motivation and Engagement	SEL activities make learning more meaningful and engaging, increasing intrinsic motivation.
	Better Social Skills	Students learn to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers, and resolve conflicts.
Teachers	Effective Classroom Management	SEL provides teachers with strategies to manage classroom behaviour and create a positive learning environment.

	Reduced Teacher Stress	A supportive and cooperative classroom atmosphere reduces teacher burnout and stress.
Learning Environment	Positive School Climate	SEL fosters a sense of community, respect, and safety in the classroom, enhancing the overall school climate.

Communication, Collaboration and SEL in the EFL Classroom

Communication and collaboration are not only central aims of EFL instruction but also fundamental mechanisms through which Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) develops. SEL provides the interpersonal and intrapersonal foundations — such as empathy, self-regulation, and perspective-taking — that make genuine communication and effective collaboration possible. The first can be defined as “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour” (Merriam Webster, n.d., definition 1A), while the latter refers to “the social process of knowledge creation in which people work as an interdependent team in order to achieve a clear objective to reach a well-defined final product, consensus, or decision” (UNESCO, 2023, p. 37).

Beyond these definitions, both are relational competencies essential not only for language learning but also for life. For this reason, they are identified within CASEL’s framework. Communication “requires the combined skills to know how to express oneself (rhetoric), active listening, and appropriate use of non-verbal language” (UNESCO, 2023, p. 35). Collaboration, meanwhile, involves more than simply dividing students into groups: it requires tasks that help individuals (1) understand shared objectives, (2) recognise and value

each member's contributions, and (3) negotiate interactions effectively — skills aligned with SEL's relationship and social-awareness domains (UNESCO, 2023).

In EFL classrooms, communicative competence implies more than acquiring linguistic structures; it includes mastering a range of language functions and knowing what, how, and to whom to communicate (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Successfully navigating these communicative demands requires students to take risks, experiment with language, and step beyond their comfort zones — an inherently emotional process. As Brown (2014) emphasises, taking the risk of being wrong is essential for language learning, a process that also involves negotiating a new language identity and managing internal and external conflicts — challenges particularly relevant for adolescents. By supporting students' emotional and interpersonal capacities, SEL enables them to engage in these risks with confidence, fostering both linguistic development and collaborative competence.

Beyond supporting risk-taking, SEL develops the specific skills that make effective communication possible. Students rely on self-awareness and self-regulation to manage anxiety and frustration, employ social awareness to anticipate how their messages will be received, and exercise responsible decision-making to negotiate interactions constructively. Together, these competencies provide the foundation for meaningful interaction, helping learners navigate both linguistic and social challenges in the EFL classroom.

Task-based learning, teaching unplugged, and participatory methodologies (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Harmer, 2015) also illustrate how EFL pedagogies depend on SEL skills. By positioning the teacher as facilitator and placing interaction at the core of instruction, these approaches foster cooperation, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem solving. These are all skills central to SEL. Importantly, these pedagogical approaches also create structured opportunities for collaboration, where students can exercise communication, negotiation, and relationship skills in group contexts.

In order to feel confident communicating in a foreign language, students also need opportunities to collaborate. Working together in pairs or groups not only allows learners to practise language in a supportive setting but also fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. Collaboration provides a social-emotional scaffold: students can take risks, make mistakes, and negotiate meaning while feeling supported by their peers. In this sense, communication and collaboration are mutually reinforcing — developing one strengthens the other — and both rely on SEL competencies such as empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional regulation to create a safe and effective learning environment.

As a result, collaborative work in EFL settings has been shown to produce measurable benefits in both linguistic and interpersonal domains. Dobao (2014) found that pair and small-group interaction increased lexical language-related episodes (LREs) and problem solving. Zambrana (2020) highlighted the role of social environments in enabling interaction, while Cervantes et al. (2012) observed that group work encourages communication strategies. Furthermore, Budiansyah et al. (2025) demonstrated that integrating SEL strategies into classroom practice significantly improves collaboration skills, resulting in measurable gains in teamwork, responsibility, and constructive feedback. Together, these studies confirm that embedding SEL into communication and collaboration practices strengthens both language development and social-emotional competencies.

Overall, practising communication and collaboration in the EFL classroom goes far beyond merely speaking English in groups. To make these interactions meaningful, teachers must actively guide students to listen attentively, recognise strengths and areas for growth, negotiate meaning, and manage conflicts — all core aspects of SEL. By fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and perspective-taking, SEL provides the essential foundation that enables learners to engage actively, take risks, and navigate group dynamics effectively. Integrating these competencies into everyday classroom practice not only supports language acquisition but also equips adolescents with the relational and emotional capacities needed for meaningful interaction and lifelong learning.

Table 4: Communication, Collaboration and SEL in the EFL Classroom

Description: This table summarises the key terms explored in this section.

EFL Classroom	Key Points
Communication	More than grammar: involves listening, expressing, and negotiating meaning. Requires risk-taking and disinhibition. Builds communicative competence.
Collaboration	Involves shared goals, problem solving, and mutual support. Goes beyond “just working in groups”. Strengthens language through social interaction.
Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)	The classroom is a community where emotional experiences shape learning. Students feel vulnerable using a foreign language. SEL encourages empathy, participation, and awareness, supporting learners in challenging moments and enhancing communication and collaboration skills.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and its relevance to adolescence, EFL classrooms, and the development of communication and collaboration skills. To achieve this, the discussion was structured into distinct sections that offered a comprehensive perspective on the topic. First, the main conceptual frameworks of SEL were outlined, demonstrating both the diversity of existing models and their shared

emphasis on the cultivation of social, emotional, and cognitive competencies. This was followed by a review of empirical research, which consistently highlights the positive effects of SEL on students' well-being, social relationships, and academic achievement, while also underscoring the importance of well-designed, evidence-based interventions.

The focus then turned to adolescence, a developmental stage marked by profound psychological, social, and neurological changes, and therefore particularly conducive to the acquisition of socio-emotional skills. Within this context, attention was given to the specific circumstances of Argentine adolescents, for whom schools often represent the primary space in which SEL can be meaningfully developed. The discussion illustrated how SEL offers essential tools to address the challenges faced by this group, while also aligning with both national educational policies and international priorities.

Subsequently, the analysis considered the significance of SEL in EFL classrooms, which were presented not merely as sites of linguistic instruction but as social environments where learners navigate complex emotions, challenges, and interactions. In these settings, SEL contributes to sustaining motivation, enhancing self-confidence, and mitigating anxiety, thereby enabling more meaningful engagement with the target language.

Finally, the chapter examined the role of SEL in strengthening communication and collaboration, which are central to both language learning and personal development. By fostering empathy, active listening, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution, SEL equips students with essential competencies for effective communication and collaboration, while simultaneously supporting teachers in cultivating positive classroom dynamics.

Taken together, the evidence reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that SEL is not a secondary component of education but rather a unifying pedagogical approach. It integrates academic, social, and emotional dimensions, positioning itself as a valuable resource for adolescent development, for the improvement of EFL learning experiences, and for the cultivation of communication and collaboration as lifelong competencies. This synthesis sets

the conceptual foundation for the following chapter, which critically analyses the existing literature to identify challenges, gaps, and limitations in current SEL research and practice — particularly within EFL contexts.

Chapter Two

A Critical Analysis of SEL and Its Connection to EFL Classrooms, Communication, and Collaboration

In the previous chapter, a comprehensive overview of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was presented, including its main frameworks, the scientific evidence supporting it, and its potential contributions to adolescence, EFL classrooms, and the development of communication and collaboration skills. All things considered, those findings underscored SEL's promise as a unifying pedagogical approach that integrates academic, social, and emotional dimensions.

Building on that foundation, the present chapter shifts from description to critique. Its purpose is to examine the existing literature from a critical perspective, drawing attention to caveats identified by researchers and to the current limitations of SEL, particularly in relation to EFL classrooms and the development of communicative and collaborative competencies among adolescent learners. While the positive outcomes of SEL are well documented, it is equally important to acknowledge its conceptual, methodological, and contextual challenges in order to achieve a balanced understanding.

Accordingly, this chapter first reviews general caveats raised in the literature, such as the heterogeneity of frameworks, the lack of precision in definitions, and the gaps in measurement. It then explores specific limitations regarding the implementation of SEL in EFL settings, with special attention to communication and collaboration skills. To deepen the analysis, it also considers the current scenario of SEL in Argentina, drawing on emerging initiatives as well as on the practical challenges they entail. By addressing these issues, the discussion aims to provide a more nuanced view of SEL, clarifying both its potential and its constraints within the educational context.

SEL General Caveats Identified by Researchers

Over the past two decades, research on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has expanded rapidly, generating substantial evidence of its benefits. Yet this growth has also prompted critical reflection among scholars regarding the field's conceptual coherence and methodological rigour. Recent reviews (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2019) caution that SEL research is marked by inconsistencies in terminology, theoretical orientation, and assessment practices. These caveats do not undermine the value of SEL but underscore the need for greater conceptual clarity and precision in both research and implementation.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) encompasses a broad set of competencies that can be analysed from different disciplinary perspectives. For instance, while Goleman, as a psychologist, associates these skills with Emotional Intelligence, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) categorizes them under the broader SEL framework. Consequently, although interventions often share common characteristics, SEL cannot be regarded as a homogeneous construct (Cipriano et al., 2023). As Taylor et al. (2017) emphasise, SEL should not be interpreted as a “one size fits all” approach.

This heterogeneity reflects variability in programme content, features, duration, dosage, and sequencing, as well as in the individuals who implement and evaluate them (Cipriano et al., 2023). As these authors note, differences stem both from the theoretical models that underpin programmes and from the disciplinary frameworks guiding research. Jones et al. (2019) view such heterogeneity as a by-product of SEL's interdisciplinary scope.

While this breadth fosters innovation, it also generates conceptual ambiguity: researchers and practitioners may use one term to describe distinct constructs, or different terms to describe similar ones (Berg et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2022; Greenberg et al., 2023; Cipriano et al., 2023). To address this, researchers call for greater precision in definitions,

practices, and settings, which would enable closer alignment between research, evidence, and evaluation. In Jones et al.'s words (2019, p. 137):

Develop a better understanding of which skills and competencies are the same, which are different, and which overlap across disciplines, ultimately allowing us to move beyond fads and quick-fix approaches to closer alignment between research and evidence, programmes and strategies, and assessment and evaluation. It is important to note that precision does not apply only to constructs and outcomes but is equally relevant to practices and strategies (e.g., what is actually meant by “project-based learning”) and settings (e.g., what is a common and shared definition of “school climate”).

Interdisciplinarity, while enriching, also poses challenges. Since SEL can be examined through psychology, education, neuroscience, biology, or mindfulness, among others, each field produces frameworks that reflect its own priorities. One study identified at least 136 frameworks across nearly 20 domains (Berg et al., 2017). Although this diversity provides flexibility and choice, it may create a false sense of comprehensiveness while, actually, Berg et al. (2017) stress that existing frameworks often fail to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups, students with disabilities, or youth exposed to trauma. Besides, few models specify competencies by age range, which risks obscuring the unique developmental needs of adolescents. Moreover, further research is needed on the connection between SEL and technology — a domain that increasingly shapes young people's lives and therefore cannot be overlooked when analysing their social and emotional development.

Another caveat concerns the state of SEL evidence. While research shows consistent benefits across contexts, Durlak et al. (2022, p. 4) note that studies have yet to clarify which individual, contextual, methodological, and programmatic variables most strongly promote or hinder SEL skill development. Cipriano et al. (2023) argue that the literature is oversaturated and highlight the need for more precise measures of SEL effects, improved

monitoring of implementation, and clearer reporting. Indeed, many meta-analyses demonstrate positive outcomes without specifying exactly which competencies were measured, making comparison difficult. The coexistence of more than 20 terms referring to SEL (European Commission, 2018), alongside 136 different frameworks, illustrates this oversaturation. Definitions vary in breadth and specificity, sometimes grouping distinct competencies under one construct, and at other times fragmenting one skill into several (Berg et al., 2017). As Berg et al. (2017, p. 10) propose, advancing the field requires a “super framework” built on psychometric testing, expert consensus, and cross-cultural validation.

Overall, while the research base supporting SEL is promising, these limitations reveal important gaps. Without greater clarity in terminology, frameworks, and measurement, SEL risks presenting an appearance of completeness while lacking depth and precision. As a result, theory and practice alike may be affected. For the purposes of this thesis, these caveats are particularly relevant, as they suggest that SEL interventions cannot be assumed to work uniformly but must be adapted to context — including the specific realities of adolescent learners in EFL classrooms.

Specific Limitations of SEL in relation to EFL Classrooms, Communication and Collaboration in these Contexts

After exploring the general caveats related to SEL, this section examines the limitations that arise in the EFL context, particularly regarding the development of communication and collaboration skills. In order to enrich this analysis, a brief overview of how SEL is represented in Argentina is provided.

In recent years, educators worldwide have expressed increasing concern for the social and emotional health of students and teachers. Although the body of research is still developing, the overall outcomes of SEL interventions have been satisfactory, leading educational systems to adopt strategies designed to strengthen students’ social and emotional skills. Argentina is no exception. Both the City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and Buenos Aires

province have recently enacted policies that aim to encourage social and emotional competencies and promote student well-being (see appendix A). In addition, various congresses and conventions are held throughout the year that address these concerns through workshops and lectures, such as the Mentora Education Conference (MEC) and courses organised by Asociación Educar.

Parallel to these developments, the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has also acknowledged the importance of social and emotional competencies. Established institutions such as Cambridge (see appendix B), Oxford (Mercer et al., 2020), and Pearson (n.d.) have encouraged programmes and produced reports and toolkits that include the promotion of well-being and SEL. In Argentina specifically, events such as the Share Convention and courses offered by the English Speaking Scholastic Association of the River Plate (ESSARP) provide teachers with opportunities to broaden their knowledge of SEL and to explore practical applications in the EFL classroom.

Despite these initiatives, it should be stressed that much of the existing SEL literature — especially at the secondary level — has been conducted in American and European contexts. In Argentina, although SEL has recently gained attention and policies are being implemented in CABA, there is almost no evaluation of their impact. Similarly, while investigations and programmes are beginning to emerge (see Appendix C), there remains a lack of robust evidence regarding SEL interventions in the Argentine context, particularly at the secondary level.

A similar gap exists in relation to SEL research in EFL classrooms, particularly when focusing on communication and collaboration skills among adolescents. Although it is possible to establish a theoretical connection between SEL and these competencies, this relationship has not yet been directly tested or demonstrated. At present, the variables that influence SEL, communication, and collaboration in the EFL classroom remain largely unknown. Researchers must still explore how these constructs interact, particularly in light

of the additional challenges of foreign language learning, such as language barriers, which may further affect students' willingness and ability to communicate.

Beyond theory, the practice of SEL in EFL classrooms must also be considered. While research has underscored the interdisciplinarity of SEL and the multiplicity of frameworks, it is clear that there is no single way of promoting SEL in schools. Despite the abundance of literature on SEL (Cipriano et al., 2023), practical resources for fostering these skills in class — and particularly in EFL contexts — remain limited. Whether aligned with the SAFE criteria or not, concrete classroom strategies are still scarce. Consequently, there remains a pressing need to strengthen the bridge between theory and practice by designing and sharing practical approaches that can be applied in diverse learning environments and, more specifically, in EFL classrooms. This last point does not come without its challenges, which are explored below.

The Practical Implications of these Findings and Limitations for Schools and EFL Educators

Following the outline of the general findings and caveats identified by researchers, together with the limitations observed in EFL classrooms, it is now pertinent to examine how these considerations may manifest in practice, presenting potential challenges for schools and EFL educators in Argentina when attempting to incorporate SEL into their curricula.

First, effective implementation of SEL requires resources such as training opportunities, appropriate materials, and dedicated class time. For many schools, particularly those with limited budgets, allocating these resources can be difficult. Second, as highlighted in the research, SEL programmes must be culturally relevant and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of students. Teachers therefore need to adapt SEL practices to align with the cultural norms and values of their learners, which demands additional time and effort. This process may encounter resistance not only due to economic constraints or lack of time, but also because educators, students, and parents may be accustomed to more traditional

approaches to language teaching. Addressing such misconceptions and demonstrating the benefits of SEL through evidence and successful experiences is therefore essential for overcoming resistance.

Assessment and evaluation also present challenges. Traditional assessment tools often fail to capture the full scope of social and emotional skills. For this reason, it is crucial to develop effective evaluation methods that accurately reflect SEL outcomes and contribute to improving implementation.

Finally, while SEL has the potential to significantly enhance student learning, it must be integrated in ways that complement rather than overwhelm language learning. Ensuring balance is key to maintaining both linguistic and socio-emotional progress.

In conclusion, integrating SEL in EFL classrooms can offer substantial benefits by enriching language learning and fostering students' overall development. Nevertheless, it also raises challenges that require careful planning, adequate resources, and sustained support. By acknowledging these challenges and leveraging SEL's potential, EFL educators can create more dynamic, supportive, and effective learning environments. As Jones et al. (2013, p. 65) observe:

Involving everyone, especially administrators, and integrating adult SEL with ongoing approaches to support students' SEL means a significant shift in how we think about the mission of education: A fundamental understanding that social and emotional competencies are not secondary to the mission of education, but concrete factors in the success of teachers, students, and schools.

All in all, this chapter has critically examined the literature on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and its limitations, situating the discussion within both the general field of education — including the Argentine context — and the specific scope of EFL classrooms. The review first underscored the heterogeneity of SEL frameworks and the conceptual ambiguity that arises from their multiplicity. It also drew attention to gaps in evidence,

particularly the lack of precision in definitions, outcomes, and measures, which complicates the evaluation of SEL's real impact.

In addition, the analysis highlighted the specific challenges of transferring SEL to EFL classrooms, especially when focusing on communication and collaboration skills among adolescent learners. Although the potential connections between SEL and these relational competencies are evident, research on this interaction remains scarce, and practical classroom strategies are still limited. These limitations reinforce the importance of considering cultural and contextual factors, as well as the need for adequate resources, teacher training, and evaluation tools to ensure meaningful implementation.

Taken together, these considerations reveal both the promise and the complexity of SEL. On the one hand, it offers significant opportunities to enrich language learning and support students' overall development; on the other, it demands careful adaptation to context and a stronger bridge between theory and practice. By acknowledging these tensions, the chapter lays the groundwork for the following discussion, which examines in greater depth the role that SEL may play in enhancing communication and collaboration skills within EFL classrooms.

Chapter Three

An Analysis of the Role of SEL in the Enhancement of Communication and Collaboration Skills in the EFL Classrooms and its Implications

The previous chapter examined SEL from a critical perspective, highlighting both its potential and its limitations, particularly in relation to EFL classrooms and the development of communicative and collaborative competencies among adolescent learners. It also underscored that effective integration of SEL requires intentional decision-making, reflection, and sustained teacher support. Building on these insights, the present chapter turns to a more focused analysis of how SEL may contribute to the enhancement of communication and collaboration in EFL classrooms.

Specifically, this chapter explores the potential role of SEL in fostering these two relational skills among adolescent students, while also considering the decisive influence of teachers and their own social and emotional competencies in this process. By situating students' needs and teachers' roles within the same discussion, the analysis acknowledges that communication and collaboration in the EFL classroom depend not only on the skills of learners but also on the social, emotional, and relational capacities of the adults who guide them.

The chapter is therefore organised around two interrelated dimensions. First, it examines how SEL can support the creation of supportive and affirming classroom environments that encourage adolescents to communicate and collaborate with confidence despite the vulnerabilities inherent in learning a foreign language. Second, it considers the implications for EFL teachers, emphasising the importance of their own social and emotional skills, well-being, and professional growth in shaping classroom climate and modelling the competencies expected of students.

In this way, chapter 3 bridges the theoretical and critical perspectives explored earlier with the practical strategies outlined in chapter 4. While the analysis here remains conceptual, its aim is to clarify the conditions under which SEL can meaningfully enhance communication and collaboration in adolescent EFL classrooms, thereby setting the stage for the concrete practices and classroom applications that are addressed in the next chapter.

Building Supportive and Affirming Learning Environments through SEL

Research has shown that educators can implement SEL through three main approaches: (1) explicit skill instruction, (2) integration with academic subjects, and (3) general practices that promote a positive learning environment (Dusenbury et al., 2015; NC-SEAD, 2019). While the first two approaches may contribute to students' social and emotional development, their impact on communication and collaboration in EFL classrooms seems more indirect. By contrast, practices that foster a supportive and affirming environment directly address the conditions necessary for learners to express themselves in another language.

A classroom with these SEL traits could be defined as one in which students feel welcomed and seen while they are allowed to deepen bonds with each other and between course material and their personal experiences (Yoder et al., 2021). In EFL contexts, students must navigate not only the challenge of expressing ideas in a foreign language but also the vulnerability of making mistakes in front of peers. These circumstances make the creation of an affirming and supportive learning environment indispensable. For learners to feel comfortable enough to engage in communicative tasks and collaborative activities, they need to feel a sense of community and belonging, as well as trust in their peers and teacher. Thus, a central role of SEL in enhancing communication and collaboration is precisely its contribution to building such a space, where students feel supported, valued, and safe to participate.

Cipriano et al. (2023) have demonstrated that SEL interventions improve school climate. Moreover, there is a reciprocal relationship between fostering social and emotional competencies and cultivating supportive environments: progress in one reinforces the other (Osher, 2018; Yoder, 2021). As Schwartz et al. (2025, p. 10) point out:

Supportive climates take root when every part of the school day promotes students' SEL. As students move between classrooms, lunch periods, hallways, and various in- and out-of-school time programmes, their experiences shape how they perceive themselves, relate to others, address conflicts, and make decisions.

These supportive environments can be analysed both at the macro level (educational systems and schools) and the micro level (classrooms and specific learning spaces). Although enhancing SEL skills requires interdependence between both levels, addressing such a broad challenge exceeds the scope of this thesis (see appendix D). This subsection therefore focuses specifically on how to build supportive and affirming environments in face-to-face EFL *classrooms* for adolescent students. In the Argentine context, this discussion is particularly relevant given the challenges many adolescents face in engaging confidently in EFL learning. Limited resources, varying classroom conditions, and diverse student backgrounds make the creation of supportive environments even more crucial.

Building Supportive and Affirming EFL Classrooms for Adolescents

Since this thesis concentrates on adolescent learners, it is essential to consider how the specific characteristics of this developmental stage shape the way supportive environments can be created. Adolescence is often described as the transition from childhood to adulthood and is marked by significant psychological, emotional, and biological changes. During this period, individuals begin to consolidate their character and develop independent thinking, while also seeking autonomy and often showing reactions of opposition. At the same time, adolescents display more prosocial behaviour, becoming increasingly concerned with their social lives and with others' perceptions of them. These changes are frequently

accompanied by heightened emotionality and mood instability (Gómez Masdevall et al., 2016).

Many researchers refer to adolescence as a “second window of opportunity,” since the brain at this stage is particularly malleable and responsive to change. Yet adolescents are much more than the sum of these traits. Each represents a unique psycho-social and affective reality, situated in a specific context and time, often experienced very differently from the way adults remember their own adolescence. As Guerrero (2020) observes, being an adolescent today is especially complex, as developmental challenges combine with factors such as the overuse of technology and the demands of liquid modernity, creating an “explosive combination”.

Building supportive and affirming environments for adolescent students therefore requires acknowledging these dynamics. EFL learners in particular, may experience frustration, anxiety, fear, or tension regardless of their level of proficiency (Brown, 2014). These difficulties can be amplified during adolescence, when students’ heightened concern for peer approval and identity formation makes them more vulnerable. Peer support, while vital, can also be fragile, as adolescents themselves are navigating similar challenges (Guerrero, 2020). Within the EFL classroom — a space where students may already feel exposed — such fragility can further undermine their confidence. This underscores the need for environments that provide belonging and security.

As Hufford (2014, p. 14) highlights, genuine communion in the classroom requires students “to speak up, to communicate a personal reality, to be a presence in the classroom... to become part of the learning community, to contribute to its intellectual, emotional, and social — even spiritual — health”. However, such environments do not occur naturally. As Schwartz et al. (2025, p. 10) remind us, “supportive classroom and school cultures are created by choice, not chance”. Creating them involves both tangible and intangible elements (McGinty et al., 2013).

The tangible dimension is primarily associated with the physical setting of the classroom. McGinty et al. (2013, p. 51) point out that these may comprise “clean, well-lighted classrooms that are pleasant smelling, well laid out for multiple uses, and aesthetically pleasing, and that contain multiple resources”. In practice, this entails a series of deliberate decisions regarding the material organisation of the learning space. For instance, it requires reflecting on the arrangement of desks and tables so as to facilitate flexible configurations (McGinty et al., 2013; Cossini & Ballini, 2023), ensuring that the temperature remains comfortable for students’ sustained concentration (McGinty et al., 2013), and making careful use of colour schemes and textures to enhance, rather than distract from, the learning process. It also involves employing signage that is clear and accessible, as well as avoiding what Cossini and Ballini (2023) describe as “visual contamination”. The latter is crucial to provide learners with sufficient cognitive space to process information and to prevent feelings of sensory overload (McGinty et al., 2013). Taken together, these seemingly small yet significant factors contribute to the establishment of a classroom environment that is physically conducive to learning.

In contrast, the intangible dimension pertains to the emotional, psychological, and relational atmosphere within the classroom (Cossini & Ballini, 2023). According to McGinty et al. (2013, p. 52), these less visible but equally critical aspects include “a safe, nonthreatening environment, others’ interest in success, social interaction, active engagement in hands-on and minds-on learning, integration of multiple intelligences, opportunities for inquiry and problem solving, and real-life relevant activities”. Such elements foreground the importance of cultivating a climate where students feel not only intellectually stimulated but also personally valued and supported. Along similar lines, Yoder et al. (2021, p. 12) stresses the importance of adopting warmth and support strategies to foster learning experiences that enable students to affirm their sense of worth, build meaningful relationships with peers and educators, experience comfort and psychological safety, and develop the confidence to advocate for themselves. In this sense, the intangible dimension complements the tangible

one, since both are indispensable for creating a learning environment that is not only functional but also deeply affirming and responsive to learners' needs.

Another crucial element is language. According to Yoder et al. (2021), meaningful communication between teachers and students is central to encouraging participation and reducing inhibition. Verbal communication can foster authenticity and community (Hufford, 2014). In this regard, it should be highlighted that:

When educators ask the reflective questions and reinforce specific interactions, they discover where students are coming from, help students connect academics through their social and emotional skills, and build vocabulary for students to identify and express emotions and thoughts. Educators can also demonstrate humility in their communications with students (...). Effective power of language avoids language that is humiliating or sarcastic as well as discipline by fear, intimidation, and indifference to students. (Yoder et al., 2021, p. 18)

If used effectively, language allows teachers not only to connect with students more deeply but also to model positive patterns of communication. As Cossini and Ballini (2023, p. 49) affirm: "It is vital to be conscious of what we say and, overall, how we say what we say," since, as Rosenberg (2013, p. 16) notes by quoting Ruth Bebermeyer, "words are windows (or they're walls)". Assertive communication thus becomes essential for building respectful, lasting relationships and for managing conflicts constructively.

Equally significant to classroom communication are the non-verbal dimensions. As Martikainen (2019) notes, teaching is not solely verbal but also profoundly visual. Facial expressions, gestures, posture, and other cues (Mehrabian, 1972) shape classroom dynamics, and alignment between verbal and non-verbal signals strongly shapes how messages are interpreted; incongruence can undermine comprehension and trust in interaction (Mehrabian, 1971). This is particularly relevant in EFL contexts, where strategies such as eye contact, body language, and expressive gestures can aid comprehension and facilitate classroom

management (Najarzadegan, 2014; Martikainen, 2019). Moreover, these subtle signals communicate aspects of personality and disposition — such as enthusiasm, empathy, confidence, or approachability (Halonen, 2002) — which students are remarkably adept at perceiving (Martikainen, 2019). Since such impressions tend to be enduring, they influence students' responsiveness (Malachowski & Martin, 2011) and, consequently, their willingness to collaborate and engage in classroom interaction. Therefore, it is essential to consider verbal and non-verbal communication together, as their interplay can either foster or hinder a supportive and affirming learning environment where relational skills may flourish.

Beyond communication, careful observation is another tool for fostering supportive classrooms. By observing the class, teachers can identify behavioural issues as well as students' emotional strengths and vulnerabilities. This enables them to design strategies tailored to their students' needs and to encourage collaboration and participation. Additionally, as Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) posit, observing the positive and negative attitudes of a group, knowing its cohesion, the ways conflict may manifest and the roles that each member plays in it are strategies or resources that one should consider in order to build a classroom where educators and students understand and respect each other. In EFL tasks, teachers can track observable indicators such as turn-taking balance, number/quality of clarification requests, peer-feedback moves, conflict-resolution episodes, and willingness to communicate (WTC) during pair/group work.

At the same time, adolescents benefit from both freedom and structure. Providing opportunities for choice — such as deciding how rather than what to do — helps them challenge themselves and develop agency, while supportive limits prevent feelings of rejection and promote security (Gómez Masdevall et al., 2016; Guerrero, 2020). Establishing class rules regarding language, register, or error correction from the outset gives students clarity about expectations.

To conclude, building supportive and affirming EFL classrooms for adolescents requires intentional, carefully considered decisions that integrate both tangible and intangible

aspects of the learning environment. Classrooms should combine warmth and care, opportunities for choice and responsibility, promotion of problem solving and agency, and meaningful teacher-student communication — all grounded in SEL principles. Such environments provide the foundation for effective communication and collaboration, enabling adolescents to express themselves confidently, listen actively, negotiate meaning, and work constructively with peers. By addressing students' developmental needs — heightened emotionality, identity formation, and social sensitivities — these environments foster both relational and linguistic growth. Within this process, the teacher or adult leading the group plays a pivotal role, guiding interactions, modelling relational skills, and shaping the classroom climate — a role that is examined in the next subsection.

The Implications for EFL Teachers in this Task and The Need to Work on their Own Social and Emotional Skills First

While learning a foreign language can generate frustration, anxiety, and fear in students (Brown, 2014), these challenges are not experienced in isolation. For adolescents, whose heightened social awareness makes them particularly sensitive to the opinions of peers and adults, such emotions may be intensified. In this context, teachers' social and emotional skills become decisive, as they not only mediate how students navigate these challenges but also shape the overall classroom climate and opportunities for meaningful learning.

Teachers, like other educators, do much more than transmit content. They also model ways of communicating, interacting, behaving, and perceiving themselves and others. As Cossini and Ballini (2023) note, teaching inherently involves modelling: through what teachers say and do — or choose not to say or do — they affect students' development of self, mind, and behaviour. In this way, they have a direct impact on classroom climate, either positively or negatively. For these reasons, Schonert-Reichl (2017) emphasises that it is necessary to “teach the teachers first”. Similarly, Bisquerra (2012) argues that only when teachers have explored their inner selves and acquired SEL competencies can they help

students develop the skills highlighted in CASEL's framework: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

The fact that students learn through teachers' modelling highlights the role that the environment plays in human development. As Osher et al. (2020, p. 23) explain:

Development is not predetermined, fixed, or linear; it is not prefigured in a genetic programme but, rather, it is unique to each and every individual, highly responsive to environments, cultures, and relationships, continuously adapting, organising, and reorganising, and subject to change across the lifespan.

This adaptability underscores the extent to which teachers' own behaviours, choices, and emotional regulation influence adolescents' growth.

One factor that strongly mediates teachers' ability to model SEL effectively is their own well-being. Schonert-Reichl (2017, p. 138) warns: "If we don't accurately understand teachers' own well-being and how teachers influence students' SEL, we can never fully know whether and how to promote SEL in the classroom". A central threat to this well-being is burnout, or occupational stress. Though sometimes overlooked, burnout is highly significant, as it undermines not only teachers' health and performance but also students' academic and personal development. In a study of 4th–7th grade students — an age of considerable social, cognitive, and emotional change — Oberle et al. (2016) found that "higher morning cortisol levels in students could be significantly predicted from the higher burnout levels in classroom teachers" (p. 35). In other words, stress is contagious: when teachers experience burnout, students also suffer its "collateral damage" (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Jones et al., 2013).

Research further shows that burnout and SEL competencies are interconnected. Burnout, typically experienced as emotional exhaustion and detachment, directly affects day-to-day teacher–student interactions (Oberle et al., 2020). It contributes to deteriorating relationships and often results in punitive or reactive management strategies. In their study of 676 students in 35 classrooms, Oberle et al. (2020) concluded that teacher burnout

significantly predicted students' ratings of teachers' social and emotional competence: teachers reporting higher burnout were perceived as less socially and emotionally competent, whereas those reporting lower burnout were perceived as more competent. Limited emotional regulation skills, often associated with burnout, also undermine teachers' ability to model effective stress management, to connect sensitively with challenging students, and to maintain focus in the classroom (Jones et al., 2013).

These findings underscore that teachers' social and emotional skills are not optional add-ons but central to their professional role. Yet, while the need is clear, the question remains how these competencies can be cultivated in practice. The next subsection addresses this issue by examining concrete ways of supporting EFL teachers in developing their own SEL skills.

Ways of Improving EFL Teachers' Own Social and Emotional Skills

To improve teachers' social and emotional skills, their sense of self should be addressed first. As Williams et al. (2024, p. 6) explains:

Educators' understanding of their identity allows for reflection on the impact their identities have on those they are tasked to serve, positions them to develop supportive relationships with youth of differing identities, and creates an openness to the identities, cultures, and assets of others.

However, teacher development requires more than individual effort; it demands systemic support. A change in educational perspective — requiring organisation, time, and resources — is needed, though this is not an easy task. In Argentina, where schools often face pressing demands with limited resources, creating such conditions can be particularly challenging.

Building a culture of collaboration and communication is a crucial starting point. Forging a collective vision and a trusting community can empower teachers, strengthen their

sense of agency, and provide them with the freedom to try new practices and learn from them. Equally important is giving teachers structured time for critical reflection on their professional and personal selves. According to Williams (2024), this process should be rooted in continuous improvement and curiosity, essential features of a learning culture. Tools such as the *Educator SEL Self-Reflection Tool* and the *Wheel of Life* (see appendix E & appendix F) can support this process by enabling educators to evaluate different spheres of their lives. Jones (2013, p. 65) also stresses that reflection should be systematically embedded:

Administrators can build it into meetings and supervision, colleagues can be assigned partners or teams for regular reflective discussions, and all staff can be encouraged to take regular time for reflection, even if it's just five minutes at the beginning of the day and five minutes at the end.

Other interventions include emotion-focused training to help teachers recognise, reflect on, and reframe their emotions, as well as relationship-building interventions that provide coaching and feedback on teacher–student interactions (Jones, 2013). Stress-reduction practices such as mindfulness can also help, as seen in programmes developed in the United States, including the Prosocial Classroom Model, Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), the Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM for Educators), and the 4Rs + MTP project.

Finally, the adoption of consistent SEL routines — such as “Stop and Stay Cool” or the Decision Tree for guided choices (Jones, 2013) — can support teachers’ ongoing emotional regulation and strengthen their modelling of SEL for students.

In conclusion, teachers’ social and emotional skills lie at the heart of their professional practice, particularly when working with adolescents. Their ability to model SEL skills such as empathy, self-regulation, perspective-taking, and relationship skills

directly shapes the classroom climate, influencing how students engage, communicate, and collaborate. Research demonstrates that teacher burnout or limited emotional regulation can hinder these interactions, while strong SEL competencies support meaningful learning and constructive social dynamics (Oberle et al., 2016; Oberle et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2013). In this sense, the development of teachers' own SEL is foundational: it enables them to foster supportive, collaborative, and communicative learning environments where students can take risks, negotiate meaning, and develop both linguistic and interpersonal competence. Strengthening these competencies, therefore, is not merely a personal or professional enhancement — it is essential for creating classrooms where adolescents thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Table 5: Ways of Improving EFL Teachers' Own Social and Emotional Skills

Description: This table summarises the key ideas explored in this section.

Environment	Other possible interventions	Other skills needed	Implemented Programmes in The USA
Build a culture of collaboration through a collective vision	Emotion-focused training	Critical reflection and reflective practice	The Prosocial Classroom Model
Support or create spaces of connection and belonging	Relationship-building interventions		Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB)
Organisational conditions on educator agency	Mindfulness and stress reduction		Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in

Trusting community SEL routines and learning culture	Education (CARE) Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM for Educators)
Having the space to try new things and learn from that experience	The 4Rs + MTP project

All in all, this chapter has examined the potential role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in enhancing communication and collaboration in EFL classrooms, with particular attention to adolescent learners. The analysis first underscored the importance of supportive and affirming classroom environments, where students feel safe, valued, and encouraged to take the risks inherent in learning a foreign language. It then highlighted the decisive influence of teachers, whose social and emotional skills shape the relational climate of the classroom and serve as models for the very competencies students are expected to acquire.

For adolescent learners in particular, these conditions are essential. At a developmental stage marked by identity formation, heightened sensitivity to peer approval, and fluctuating emotions, adolescents require environments that foster belonging, trust, and meaningful interaction. SEL, when intentionally integrated, can help reduce anxiety, support prosocial behaviour, and strengthen their willingness to communicate and collaborate despite the vulnerabilities associated with speaking in another language.

Taken together, these insights suggest that the effectiveness of SEL in EFL classrooms depends on more than theoretical knowledge or isolated strategies. Rather, it requires intentional decision-making, a culture of reflection, and sustained support for teachers to cultivate their own well-being and professional growth. Without such conditions, the gap between SEL theory and classroom practice may persist, with negative consequences for students' participation, communication, and collaboration.

In this sense, the chapter underscores both the opportunities and the challenges of integrating SEL into EFL education. While SEL holds the potential to transform language learning into a more holistic and relational process, its success ultimately rests on the ability of teachers and institutions to embody and sustain its principles so that adolescent learners can thrive both linguistically and socio-emotionally. Building on these findings, the following chapter turns to practice, presenting concrete ideas and strategies through which SEL can be meaningfully incorporated into EFL *classrooms* to enhance communication and collaboration. In other words, this last chapter operationalizes these insights into classroom-ready tasks, routines, and assessment tools that embed SEL within communicative EFL work.

Chapter Four

Enhancing Communication and Collaboration in EFL Classrooms through SEL-Supported Affirming and Supportive Environments

Following the conceptual analysis developed in the previous chapter, this section turns to the practical dimension of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in order to bridge theory and practice. Its focus is on classroom strategies that can foster communication and collaboration skills among adolescent learners in EFL contexts by building a supportive and affirming learning environment.

Though transforming the entire school climate would require a broader change of mindsets at all levels (Schwartz, 2025; Williams, 2024; see appendix G), teachers can still play a decisive role in fostering friendly and affirming learning environments where communication and collaboration are strengthened through SEL. These efforts, however, cannot be left to chance; they call for anticipation, systematic organisation, clear objectives, and carefully planned learning experiences that integrate social and emotional skills (see appendix H). In line with this, Cossini and Ballini (2023) stress the importance of allocating specific time during the school day to develop emotional intelligence, emphasising that each intervention aimed at promoting students' emotional growth should be both intentional and documented. In time-constrained EFL contexts, SEL should be embedded within communicative tasks (pair/group work, role-plays, project talk) rather than added as standalone blocks, so instructional time remains focused on target-language use.

The purpose of this final chapter is to present guiding questions for analysing classroom climate, alongside strategies, exercises, techniques, and activities that may be incorporated into EFL lesson planning. Through them, teachers can cultivate supportive learning spaces where communication and collaboration — key relationship skills — are explicitly enhanced. While not all of these ideas fall strictly within the domain of Social and

Emotional Learning (SEL), their characteristics and the competencies they foster allow them to be reasonably situated within this field.

Reflective Questions and Observation to Identify the Current Classroom Environment

Before implementing any action, it is essential that teachers engage in critical reflection on the classroom environment, shaped as it is by the dynamics and interactions among its members.

Cossini and Ballini (2023) propose a set of guiding questions to examine the “emotional architecture” of the classroom. Regarding the emotional space, they suggest considering: What degree of tension or calm emerges in the group dynamics? What types of conflicts arise, and how many of them are reconstructed as learning opportunities? What kinds of relationships develop among the students and between students and the teacher?

For the physical space, teachers might ask: How organised is the classroom? Are there visual or auditory distractions? Is the space flexible enough to allow movement? Is the layout harmonious, and does it facilitate interaction?

When it comes to the symbolic space, questions such as the following may provide valuable insights into both strengths and weaknesses of the environment: What story do our classrooms tell? What symbolic positions do students occupy in the group’s relational dynamics? What roles begin to consolidate, and what labels emerge? How does each student perceive the position they occupy? To what extent am I aware of, and how do I intervene in, the construction of this symbolic environment without naturalizing the roles being performed?

In addition, Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) highlight that understanding a group involves recognizing two interrelated levels: the intellectual and the socio-emotional/affective. The intellectual level is the most visible — the presence of students, a class delegate, a secretary, specific topics, objectives, or tasks. The socio-emotional level,

however, refers to internal phenomena that may not always be conscious but significantly shape group life. These include body language, eye contact, silences, tone of contributions, frequency of participation, and reactions from peers. Both levels, they argue, demand careful attention and appropriate measures: effective organisation on the one hand, and a supportive classroom climate on the other.

Although reflection requires time and may not yield immediate answers, it should be regarded as a daily practice. Not only does it help build a more affirming and supportive environment, but it also promotes meaningful learning. By critically examining these dimensions, teachers become more aware of what requires improvement and are better equipped to address challenges within their classrooms. Ultimately, this type of reflection is not only a tool for identifying challenges and strengths within the classroom environment but also a preliminary step toward the effective integration of social and emotional learning (SEL) practices.

Getting Back to The Basics

In addition to reflective practices, building an affirming and supportive learning environment where communication and collaboration can flourish also requires returning to certain foundational principles. This idea, emphasised by Sir Ken Robinson in *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* (2015), involves re-examining the underlying purposes that education is meant to serve. As he argues:

To meet them, we need a radical change in how we think about and do school — a shift from the old industrial model to one based on entirely different principles and practices. People do not come in standard sizes or shapes, nor do their abilities and personalities. Understanding this basic truth is the key to seeing how the system is failing — and also how it can be transformed (p. 37).

While Robinson's broader perspective is acknowledged, the aim of this subsection is to highlight fundamental considerations from a more immediate standpoint. Specifically, it

seeks to draw attention to essential and sometimes overlooked aspects that should guide teachers as they enter the classroom. When the objective is to cultivate a climate in which communication and collaboration are central, such principles provide the necessary ground upon which Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) can be meaningfully integrated.

Building the Classroom Group and Setting the Climate

Following reflection on the classroom environment and the reconsideration of fundamental principles, attention must also be directed toward how the classroom group is built and how the overall climate is established. These processes unfold continuously through the relationships, routines, and practices that shape daily interactions, and they play a decisive role in creating conditions that can either foster or hinder communication and collaboration in the EFL classrooms.

It is important to recognise that no two classroom environments are identical. Each one is shaped by the individuals who participate in it and by the tangible and intangible elements that define its dynamics. On this point, Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) remind us that bringing together a certain number of individuals in a classroom does not automatically constitute a group. Pedagogy conceptualizes the group as a “moral person” endowed with its own existence and dynamism and oriented toward a specific purpose. It is distinct from the mere sum of its members yet depends closely on the relationships established among them. In this sense, the group and the teacher are not separate realities: each academic year, every participant seeks to belong to this “moral person”. The teacher’s influence, moreover, often rests less on formal authority than on personal merit and capacity for enthusiasm.

To strengthen the classroom group and foster a safe climate where collaboration and communication are possible, it is necessary to facilitate spaces for non-academic interaction. Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) emphasise that this does not reduce the time available for academic subjects but rather optimizes instructional time to create small opportunities for relational exchange. One basic way to do so is by beginning each lesson with the question:

“How are you feeling?”. If asked sincerely, this signals to students that their well-being matters and may encourage greater participation.

A variation on this approach is the exercise *Three Good Things*, drawn from positive psychology, where students write down and share three positive experiences from their day (Seligman et al., 2009). Such practices cultivate awareness of out-of-class influences on academic participation (Hufford, 2014) while strengthening communication skills. Research suggests that sustained use of this activity is associated with reduced depression and increased positive emotion (Seligman, 2010). Beyond individual benefits, it allows students to share meaningful experiences, develop empathy, and foster a genuine sense of community in the classroom.

Another strategy is starting the class in a circle. As Prat Gay (2017) notes, the circle “allows us to experience each other as equals. Each person is the same distance apart from the next participant, and no one is seated higher than or stands apart from others” (p. 75). Circles embody wholeness and integration, generating a sense of belonging and security essential for collaborative learning. Within this structure, students can share concerns, celebrate accomplishments, practise self-awareness, and develop active listening and respect. Moreover, by reducing perceived threat (Prat Gay, 2017), circles promote willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom.

From the very beginning of each class, teachers also have the opportunity to look closely at students and notice their expressions, body language, or overall attitude in order to understand the emotional atmosphere of the group (Najarzadegan, 2014). According to Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016), monitoring cohesion, fragmentation, and the roles adopted by members provides valuable information for fostering effective communication between teacher and group. These observations can be systematically documented in record sheets (see appendix E).

Finally, it is equally important to share the day's agenda with students and to anticipate transitions between activities (Prat Gay, 2017; Cossini & Ballini, 2023). Such practices reduce anxiety, prevent unnecessary conflicts, and help students feel secure and comfortable in the learning process, which directly impacts the environment.

In sum, fostering a cohesive classroom group and a safe, supportive climate is a continuous, intentional process rather than a spontaneous outcome. Through small yet meaningful actions — listening, observing, sharing, and anticipating — teachers help transform a collection of individuals into a genuine learning community. In such an environment, communication and collaboration can flourish naturally, allowing language learning to unfold not only as an academic endeavour but also as a profound human experience.

Ice-Breakers to Start Building an Affirming and Supportive Learning Environment

While strategies such as circles, emotional check-ins, and sharing daily agendas help strengthen the classroom group and establish a positive climate, the very first activities of the school year also play a decisive role in setting the tone to enhance communication and collaboration. At this stage, students are beginning to discover their place within the group and to form impressions of both their peers and their teacher. Carefully chosen ice-breakers can therefore function as an intentional bridge between individual learners and the collective, inviting participation, lowering anxiety, and signalling that every student is valued.

From the perspective of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), ice-breakers go beyond introductory games. They promote relationship skills through communication, collaboration, and active listening; support self-awareness and self-confidence as students share personal details; and cultivate empathy by encouraging recognition of others' experiences. In this sense, they embody SEL principles in practice, helping to transform a collection of individuals into a cohesive group ready to engage in meaningful interaction.

Below, several examples of ice-breakers taken from *Games Galore* (Monté & Carbonell, 2018) are presented. These can be implemented in the first classes of the year to foster trust, belonging, and engagement:

- **Roll the Ball:** Students sit in a circle, and the teacher begins by introducing themselves and sharing a personal detail before rolling a ball to another student. Each of them repeats the process until everyone participates. The activity is simple yet powerful: it ensures that each learner is acknowledged, fosters eye contact and turn-taking, and provides the teacher with immediate insights into students' personalities. A variation in which the teacher recalls information previously shared further reinforces attentive listening and recognition of peers.
- **Musical Chairs (discussion variation):** In this version of the traditional game, students move around the classroom while music plays. When it stops, they quickly sit in pairs and discuss a topic selected by dice roll from a list on the board. After a few minutes, the music resumes and the process begins again, with students rotating partners. This dynamic format ensures that learners interact with multiple classmates, lowers barriers to communication, and generates sustained dialogue on varied topics. A circle-based variation, where the student left without a chair introduces themselves through a topic, guarantees full participation and adds an element of challenge.
- **Snowballs:** Each student writes three personal facts on a sheet of paper, crumples it into a "snowball," and participates in a brief "snowball fight". Once the activity stops, each learner picks up a snowball, reads the facts aloud, and the group guesses who wrote it. The playful nature of the game reduces initial nervousness and creates laughter, while the guessing element promotes attentive listening and recognition of classmates. Importantly, this activity positions personal information as something to be discovered and valued, strengthening bonds in an enjoyable way.

- **Have a Guess:** The teacher writes several words, numbers, or phrases on the board that each connect to aspects of their personal life (e.g., *Africa* as the name of a pet, *Beetroot* as a disliked food). Students attempt to guess what each item represents, often producing humorous or creative interpretations. Afterward, they create their own lists and exchange them in pairs, gradually disclosing more information about themselves. This activity stimulates curiosity, motivates students to ask questions, and develops empathy by encouraging learners to view their classmates beyond the academic context.
- **Toilet Paper Fiasco:** Each student is asked to take a number of toilet paper squares, paper strips or any other available material without knowing why. Once everyone has done so, the teacher explains that each square represents one fact they must share about themselves. Students who took many squares face the challenge of providing several facts, while those with fewer still participate actively. The activity is effective in generating humour, breaking down social barriers, and encouraging creative self-disclosure. It also requires attentive listening and creates moments of shared amusement that strengthen group cohesion.

Taken together, these activities demonstrate how SEL principles can be put into practice from the very first class. Ice-breakers not only introduce students to one another but also reduce anxiety, encourage empathy, and establish early habits of communication and collaboration. In this way, they set the foundations for an affirming and supportive learning environment where adolescents feel safe to take risks, share ideas, and engage meaningfully in EFL learning.

Warmers, Fillers and Wrap-ups that Enhance a Better Classroom Environment as well as Communication and Collaboration

To foster an affirming and supportive environment where students feel encouraged to participate, communicate, and collaborate in the target language, it is essential to actively

engage them — both emotionally and academically. The EFL classroom should not be devoid of novelty and surprise, as these are inherently attractive for the brain. As Asociación Educar notes, the brainstem filters sensory information and, upon detecting something novel, releases noradrenaline to activate the brain (Rosler, n.d.). Moreover, since “people learn more at the beginning and end of a learning experience than they do in the middle” (Prat Gay, 2017, p. 44), these moments are particularly strategic for designing activities that sustain attention and enhance interaction. Activities such as warmers, fillers, and wrap-ups help create these moments of purposeful engagement, introducing opportunities for fresh input, reactivation, and reflection.

From a SEL perspective, these kinds of classroom practices do more than capture students’ attention or provide variety; they contribute directly to the development of key competencies. Warmers, fillers, and wrap-ups can nurture self-awareness (e.g., reflecting on one’s emotions and experiences), self-management (e.g., sustaining motivation and managing stress in communicative tasks), social awareness (e.g., recognizing others’ perspectives and building empathy), relationship skills (e.g., collaboration, active listening, conflict resolution), and responsible decision-making (e.g., adapting to challenges and evaluating alternatives). When integrated systematically, these activities strengthen not only language learning but also the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that are essential for a supportive and collaborative classroom environment. Below are several examples that illustrate how such practices may strengthen classroom climate and promote meaningful communication:

- **Shouted Dictation.** This activity promotes authentic listening practice in a dynamic and playful way. Students are divided into teams and pairs, with one member dictating a short text to the other across the room. Beyond practising language skills, this activity fosters collaboration, attentiveness, and mutual support, as pairs must ensure comprehension. Its change of pace and energy can contribute to a friendlier and more

supportive classroom atmosphere (Pryde et al., n.d.).

- **Twenty Questions.** By encouraging students to ask and answer yes/no questions to guess an object or person, this filler develops communicative competence while reinforcing group collaboration. It also nurtures social awareness, as students learn to adapt their questions strategically and attend to one another's contributions (Pryde et al., n.d.).
- **Alibi.** In this game, students use imagination and spontaneous English to construct and defend alibis while interacting with peers. Apart from consolidating linguistic content such as the past continuous tense, this activity cultivates creativity, cooperative problem solving, and resilience in the face of uncertainty, thereby strengthening both classroom bonds and communication (Pryde et al., n.d.).
- **Conversation Starters.** Using prompts with unusual or humorous questions, students practise spontaneous exchanges in pairs. This not only supports decision-making and adaptability but also promotes active listening and empathy, core SEL competencies that underpin effective collaboration (Pryde et al., n.d.).
- **Personal Spidergrams.** By creating diagrams around their own names with people, places, hobbies, and other personal details, students engage in structured self-disclosure. This activity promotes trust, strengthens the teacher–student relationship, and enhances social awareness, thereby contributing to a more affirming environment in which students feel safe to participate (Pryde et al., n.d.).
- **Backs to the Board.** In this vocabulary revision game, one student mimes or describes words for their peers to guess. It blends collaboration and communication with enjoyment, reinforcing peer support and shared responsibility for learning

(Pryde et al., n.d.).

- **Pair Interviews.** Students design and ask questions to interview a partner, later producing a brief profile. This encourages perspective-taking, empathy, and relationship-building, while also enhancing communication skills and confidence in using the target language (Pryde et al., n.d.).
- **Conversation Circles.** Students rotate through short paired conversations, exchanging experiences or opinions on diverse topics. Such structured interaction fosters inclusion, social bonding, and trust, particularly benefiting more vulnerable learners who may feel supported by peers with greater confidence (Pryde et al., n.d.).
- **Timed Topics.** This activity is designed to encourage spontaneous speaking, active listening, and focused communication. The teacher selects a set of topics that are relevant to students' lives (for example, *music they enjoy, a recent achievement, a challenge they faced, or their favourite place to relax*). Students are divided into pairs or small groups, and each participant is given a short, fixed amount of time (usually one to two minutes) to talk about the assigned topic without interruption. Once the time is up, the next student takes their turn. After everyone has spoken, the group can ask questions or briefly discuss what was shared (Pryde et al., n.d.).

From a social-emotional perspective, Timed Topics serve multiple purposes. On the one hand, they promote self-awareness and self-expression by giving students the chance to articulate their thoughts and feelings on a personal subject. On the other hand, they strengthen social awareness and relationship skills, as students are expected to listen attentively, respect speaking turns, and show genuine interest in their peers' contributions. Since each student has a designated time to speak, the activity also reduces anxiety for quieter learners, providing them with a safe, structured space to be heard.

- **Recapping Shape.** At the end of class, students associate concepts with geometric shapes (e.g., four key ideas for a square, three new words for a triangle). This promotes metacognition and reflection while ending the session on a positive and creative note (Pratt & Gay, 2017).
- **Exit Ticket.** Students write a brief reflection on what they learned, framed in formats such as a tweet or note. This encourages self-assessment and responsibility for learning, while also giving teachers valuable feedback.
- **Snowball.** Learners write a word they learned, crumple the paper, and engage in a playful “snowstorm” before reading one another’s contributions. This integrates fun, peer recognition, and review, helping reduce anxiety while reinforcing learning.
- **Balloon or Ball Game.** Students pass a balloon or ball while recalling content from the lesson. The activity enhances engagement, collaboration, and memory consolidation, while keeping the environment light and supportive.
- **Thinking Routines.** Drawing on Project Zero frameworks, these routines stimulate critical thinking and metacognition. They help students not only engage cognitively but also build self-regulation and awareness of others’ perspectives, strengthening the overall climate for collaboration.

Ultimately, these strategies demonstrate that language learning and social-emotional development need not be treated as separate domains. When teachers integrate purposeful activities that attend to both communication and relationships, they foster classroom climates where students not only acquire linguistic competence but also cultivate the emotional and interpersonal skills required to thrive as members of a group. In this sense, the EFL classroom becomes a space where SEL is lived in practice rather than merely discussed in theory.

Brain Breaks as Practical Strategies for Building an Affirming and Supportive Learning Environment

An affirming and supportive learning environment requires lessons that align with the way the brain processes and retains information. As Prat Gay (2017, p. 44) affirms, “learning is greatly enhanced when the whole brain is engaged”. Yet, this engagement is not limitless: adolescent students’ attention typically needs to be recaptured every 20–25 minutes (Prat Gay, 2017; Bertolini, 2023). In this context, the use of “brain breaks” emerges as a valuable strategy. These short pauses, far from being interruptions, are opportunities to restore focus, foster well-being, and sustain motivation. According to Prat Gay (2017), they offer several benefits: enhancing effectiveness, boosting positive attitudes, relieving stress, stimulating creativity, and contributing to a more enjoyable learning process. Moreover, because they are not usually incorporated into standard lessons, their novelty further strengthens attention and engagement. Overall, brain breaks also contribute to the development of SEL competencies, since they allow students to regulate emotions, reconnect with peers, and perceive learning as a safe and enjoyable experience.

Some attentional pauses or brain breaks that could be considered are the ones proposed by Graciela Bertolini (2023). These would allow students to not only stay attentive and energized to keep learning (Stein, 2018), but also to reconnect with the class and others. Some of them are listed below:

1. Movement-Based Attention Break for Re-Energizing

These pauses require movement and involve several activities. For instance, students could listen to music together while dancing or they could experience some brain gym. Apart from their physical benefits, such activities help foster positive emotions, empathy, and a sense of belonging, which are central for an affirming learning environment (Cossini & Ballini, 2023). By moving together and enjoying a collective moment, adolescents strengthen their relationship skills and reinforce the idea of being part of a community.

2. **Breathing-Based Attention Break to Promote Calm**

A Breathing-Based Attention Break designed to promote calm may be implemented through a variety of exercises. For example, learners could be invited to synchronize their breathing with an audio-visual stimulus, such as a video illustrating Darth Vader's characteristic breathing pattern. From an SEL perspective, these moments explicitly nurture emotional regulation and self-awareness, offering adolescents concrete strategies to manage stress or restlessness. They also model transferable tools that students may apply beyond the classroom setting.

3. **Review-Focused Attention Break**

As the word implies, these pauses are used to revise the content seen in class. Some possible activities could be asking students to walk around the classroom and talk about what they remember so far; having them play with a balloon or ball to refresh their minds and the content they recall; making use of some of the fillers mentioned above; or playing true or false by using their bodies (for instance, folding arms if the statement is false, or raising hands if it is true). Besides reinforcing learning, these activities build a supportive environment by framing review as a playful and cooperative experience. They strengthen students' confidence to share knowledge, foster collaboration, and reduce the anxiety often associated with being assessed.

In sum, attentional pauses or brain breaks not only optimize cognitive processes but also embody SEL principles in practice. They encourage emotional regulation, promote peer connection, and help create a classroom climate where adolescents feel safe, motivated, and engaged.

Fostering Student Agency to Build a Supportive and Affirming Learning Environment: Practical Strategies

While brain breaks ensure that students remain engaged and ready to learn, sustaining a supportive and affirming environment also requires positioning them as active agents

within the classroom. This next section explores practical ways of fostering student agency and participation.

A key aspect of Social and Emotional Learning is its emphasis on active learning methodologies, which allow skills to be transferred across curricular areas and diverse contexts, provided that learners are given opportunities to practise the competencies that promote constructive attitudes, behaviours, and cognitive processes. In this regard, UNESCO (2020, p. 167) notes that “opportunities for meaningful participation and leadership enhance students’ connectedness, as well as their skill development”. To enhance communication and collaboration skills in the EFL classroom, students’ active involvement is, therefore, indispensable since these relationship skills cannot be properly developed without their participation and agency.

To fully grasp its significance, it is essential to clarify what is meant by positioning students at the centre. Anijovich and Cappelletti (2020) conceive students as agents or protagonists. For these authors, envisioning the learner as a protagonist means recognizing them as subjects situated within a specific context, each bringing an educational trajectory, particular interests, and familiarity with multimodal forms of communication. This does not imply complete autonomy in making all learning-related decisions — such as planning, organizing, or selecting resources — but it does involve developing the capacity for self-assessment and the awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner. A student who takes on this role seeks, shares, organises, and self-organises. In practice, protagonists are those who observe, experiment, explore, imagine, discuss, and exchange ideas; they critique their own and others’ arguments; they verify knowledge, reflect on it, and revise their understandings. They also listen attentively and offer critical responses. These behaviours exemplify the active participation and reflection that SEL seeks to promote, as they require students to regulate emotions, communicate effectively, and collaborate meaningfully with others.

Building on this view, students' agency can be cultivated in various contexts and through multiple activities. The following strategies illustrate how agency, participation, and SEL can intersect to build a supportive and affirming learning environment.

Establishing a Classroom Contract

One initial strategy is the discussion of a classroom contract at the beginning of each semester. To specifically promote collaboration and communication, the contract should be co-constructed with students rather than handed out as a pre-printed photocopy, which most learners would overlook. Prat Gay (2017) emphasises the importance of setting clear rules and boundaries from the outset, as this reduces anxiety and activates cognitive neuronal pathways. Furthermore, "absence of threat is a brain-compatible element, and it is essential in building the climate of the classroom" (Prat Gay, 2017, p. 21). Similarly, Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) highlight the relevance of norms for adolescents, as they provide a sense of security and the assurance that they will not be rejected by their peers. When rules and disciplinary guidelines are accepted by the group, disruptive behaviours tend to diminish, thereby contributing to a more supportive and affirming environment. Taken together, these ideas show that establishing norms collaboratively does more than reduce anxiety or prevent misbehaviour: it also signals to students that their voices matter, thereby strengthening the foundations of a supportive climate.

Cooperative Learning as a Vehicle for Agency

Beyond shared rules, students' agency is most visible in how they work and interact with others. Cooperative learning or group work (Yoder et al., 2021) offers an ideal structure for this, as it not only enhances academic learning but also builds the relational skills central to SEL. These dynamics affirm and validate each student's voice while, in Hufford's words, "opening to unusual insights, to new paths of awareness, and to the learning potential inherent in a cacophony of voices and divergent 'ways of knowing'" (2014, p. 20).

One practical way to implement cooperative learning in the EFL classroom is through the use of powerful questions — enquiries about a particular idea, topic, or object designed to foster critical thinking and reflection, such as *Why...?*, *What could be the difference between...?*, *Imagine...*, or *What could be the reasons for...?*. The debates generated by these questions not only stimulate interaction but also require students to articulate their thinking in English, reflect on their cognitive processes, and engage in feedback exchanges in the target language. They also provide opportunities to connect with new classmates, thus strengthening relational skills (Bertolini, 2023).

Bertolini (2023), a well-known EFL teacher trainer in Argentina, suggests a variety of cooperative learning activities to foster communication, collaboration, and supportive environments. For instance, in pair work she proposes structured, time-regulated interactions. Each student begins by recording their own ideas on a given topic in a worksheet column. Then, they stand, walk, and establish brief physical contact — such as holding hands — intended to facilitate interpersonal connection. Participant A then speaks for 30 seconds while Participant B listens actively and records notes. The process is reversed, after which both compare reflections and identify commonalities, thereby promoting shared understanding.

Whole-Class Cooperative Strategies for Engagement

At the whole-class level, cooperative learning can also be enhanced through dynamic activities that diversify interaction. Strategies such as the Four Corners Activity and the Clock Partners Activity are particularly effective.

In Four Corners, students are given four options in response to a prompt and move to the corner corresponding to their choice. They then discuss their reasoning with peers who share similar perspectives.

In Clock Partners, students arrange twelve symbolic “appointments,” one for each hour on a clock, and meet different partners at scheduled times to discuss prompts. These techniques encourage structured peer exchanges and broaden interaction across the group.

Similarly, “Find Someone Who” is another dynamic and engaging activity. Students are given a grid of prompts and circulate around the classroom asking questions to find peers who match each item, recording their names. This fosters authentic communication in English, promotes meaningful use of structures, and builds social interaction.

Differentiated Engagement through Learning Stations

Another valuable approach is the use of stations, where the classroom is divided into distinct areas dedicated to specific tasks or skills. Students rotate individually or in groups, completing varied activities tailored to different learning styles and proficiency levels. This strategy encourages autonomy, collaboration, and sustained communicative practice while keeping learners engaged.

Taken together, these activities can significantly increase student engagement, especially among adolescents. By requiring learners to assume active roles and engage in sustained communication and collaboration, such practices transform the classroom into a more supportive and affirming environment. At the same time, students develop critical-thinking and English language skills through the discussion of powerful questions in the target language. In sum, these strategies strengthen both academic learning and social-emotional skills.

The Role of Group Dynamics and Assigned Roles

Finally, agency also depends on how groups are formed and the responsibilities students assume within them. Adolescents, who tend to display prosocial behaviours and seek strong bonds with peers, particularly value opportunities to work in pairs or groups. However, Prat Gay (2017) advises against random social groupings for more than 10–20%

of the school day. Purposeful grouping can be more constructive, as it represents the first step in building a supportive environment. For example, students may be assigned cards with either a capital city or a country and asked to pair up accordingly.

Equally important is the assignment of specific roles — such as material monitor, coordinator, secretary, class chief, or designer — based on students' preferences. Role distribution increases participation and fosters a genuine sense of contribution to the class (Prat Gay, 2017).

In sum, fostering students' agency through classroom contracts, cooperative learning, structured peer exchanges, varied group dynamics, and assigned roles is pivotal for cultivating a supportive and affirming classroom climate. These strategies not only strengthen communication and collaboration but also encourage adolescents to perceive themselves as active contributors to the learning process. Yet, active participation alone does not fully capture the breadth of student agency. An equally important dimension involves offering learners meaningful opportunities for choice. The following section therefore considers how student voice and choice can further consolidate an affirming and supportive environment in the EFL classroom.

Choice is Part and Parcel of an Affirming and Supportive Learning Environment

Having students at the centre not only involves positioning them as active participants but also granting them meaningful opportunities for choice. Choice is therefore part and parcel of an affirming and supportive learning environment. As Yoder et al. (2021, p. 14) point out, offering students options “helps them realise they have influence on their learning environment”.

In addition to strengthening engagement, opportunities for choice also have cognitive and emotional benefits: they increase epinephrine release, which facilitates the transfer of learning from short-term to long-term memory, while also preventing the “down-shifting” that frustration or stress can cause (Prat Gay, 2017). This is particularly relevant in the EFL

classroom, where feelings of anxiety, frustration, and vulnerability are common. Allowing students to choose their learning paths not only enhances motivation but also contributes to a sense of psychological safety. In this way, choice becomes a mechanism for affirming students' identities and for supporting their social and emotional needs.

English teacher trainer María Barberis (2023) highlights several practical ways of embedding choice in everyday practice. One useful tool is the **Choice Board**, a graphic organiser — often a 3x3 grid — that allows students to select from a variety of activities related to a single concept or learning goal. Each option addresses different skills and learning styles, ensuring that all students can approach the content in ways that suit them best. Beyond choice boards, Barberis suggests additional strategies, such as: offering a free homework pass once per quarter; allowing students to pick three out of five weekly homework tasks; creating 120-point tests where students must select items that total 100 points; giving alternative options for how assessments are completed; and even inviting students to generate test questions collaboratively.

Opportunities for choice should not be limited to *what* students learn or practise, but should also extend to *how* they process and share their knowledge. For example, learners may decide whether to internalise content by writing, drawing, or discussing with a peer. Similarly, they might present their understanding through a written piece, an audio explanation, a storyboard, a video, or a digital story. In this way, choice fosters autonomy and creativity, while also affirming diverse strengths and forms of expression.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that choice is far more than a motivational strategy. It is a powerful means of reducing anxiety, encouraging ownership of learning, and cultivating SEL competencies such as responsible decision-making, self-awareness, and confidence. By integrating opportunities for meaningful choice, teachers can further consolidate an affirming and supportive classroom environment in which adolescents feel both safe and empowered to learn.

Teachers' Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication to Be Supportive and Affirming: Practical Suggestions

While students' agency and choice are essential to shape an affirming classroom climate, teachers' communicative practices are equally decisive. The ways educators use both verbal and non-verbal language can foster students' confidence, participation, and sense of belonging — or, conversely, undermine them. In SEL terms, teacher communication directly supports self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills, making it a cornerstone of a supportive environment.

Verbal Communication: Supporting Skills and Managing Conflict

Verbal communication is not merely about addressing students but about creating the conditions for growth. As Yoder (2021) notes, language that avoids sarcasm, humiliation, or intimidation strengthens students' sense of safety and engagement. By asking meaningful questions and listening attentively, teachers can help learners recognise their strengths, reflect on challenges, and make responsible decisions. In this way, language itself becomes a tool for nurturing core SEL competencies.

Conflicts, which Gómez Masdevall et al. (2016) identify as inevitable in the development of a group, also illustrate the importance of verbal communication. Tensions may emerge as hostility, impatience, or polarization, disrupting collaboration. In such cases, non-violent communication (Rosenberg, 2013) provides a constructive alternative. Strategies such as the use of “I-messages” emphasise personal experience rather than accusation (Cossini & Ballini, 2023), while maintaining eye contact, listening without interruption, and giving space for reflection encourage students to manage emotions and seek solutions collaboratively. These practices strengthen empathy and relationship skills, turning conflict into an opportunity for group growth.

Feedback is another area where language profoundly shape the climate. Assertive, respectful communication that focuses on behaviours rather than personal traits helps

students perceive feedback as guidance rather than criticism. Cossini and Ballini (2023) recommend balancing appraisal, concerns, and suggestions while framing remarks as opinions rather than facts. Similarly, Anijovich and Cappelletti (2020) propose techniques such as descriptive feedback, scaffolding, and peer review. For instance, inviting students to circulate among group-produced responses and leave constructive comments on sticky notes fosters collaboration, critical thinking, and self-awareness.

Non-Verbal Communication: Reinforcing or Undermining Belonging

Non-verbal cues are no less influential. As Najarzagdegan (2014) observes, teachers' gestures, posture, and facial expressions communicate respect, encouragement, or disapproval — often more strongly than words. Smiling, nodding, and keeping an open posture promote confidence and approachability, while frowning, pointing, or stiff body language can discourage participation. Similarly, turning one's back, avoiding eye contact, or adopting a slumped posture may unintentionally signal disinterest or insecurity. By contrast, mindful use of open gestures — such as inviting students to speak with an upturned palm — creates a welcoming atmosphere aligned with SEL values of empathy and inclusion.

In short, teachers' communicative practices — both verbal and non-verbal — are integral to fostering a supportive and affirming environment. Through respectful language, constructive feedback, active listening, and attentive body language, educators not only reduce anxiety and conflict but also model the SEL competencies they seek to cultivate in students. Communication thus becomes not just a means of transmitting knowledge but a powerful medium for building relationships, trust, and belonging within the classroom.

This chapter has illustrated how SEL principles can be translated into practice through strategies designed to build affirming and supportive classroom environments. From reflective observation of classroom dynamics to the deliberate use of warmers, brain breaks, and cooperative structures, to fostering agency, choice, and teacher-student communication, each approach shows how SEL can be woven into everyday teaching.

At the heart of these practices lies a central aim: to strengthen students' communication and collaboration skills. By integrating SEL into classroom routines, teachers create conditions in which learners not only acquire linguistic knowledge but also develop the social and emotional competencies needed to listen actively, express themselves with confidence, negotiate meaning, and work productively with others.

In this sense, SEL in the EFL classroom is not an additional layer but a framework that enhances both language learning and relational growth. While this chapter has focused on practical applications, the following and final section of the thesis broadens the scope, drawing together the findings to reflect on the overall significance of integrating SEL into EFL contexts for the enhancement of communication and collaboration skills.

Conclusion

Restatement of Purpose and Research Questions

The present thesis has aimed to evaluate and describe the role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in enhancing communication and collaboration skills among adolescent students in face-to-face English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms. The study adopted a qualitative approach, grounded in a comprehensive review of relevant academic and scientific literature. As a conceptual and pedagogical inquiry, it does not include empirical data.

In order to achieve its aim, a detailed and critical analysis of available SEL literature was conducted. This process revealed two significant and complementary phenomena. At a general level, the review of the existing body of knowledge on SEL proved useful in describing and demonstrating the essential role that this framework plays in education, personal growth, adolescents' and teachers' development, and in the enhancement of communication and collaboration — both understood as relationship skills within CASEL's framework.

However, at a more specific level, it became evident that much of the current evidence regarding SEL does not directly address the key concepts examined in this thesis — namely, EFL classrooms and the development of communication and collaboration skills within these learning contexts. In response, and as an attempt to draw clearer connections between SEL and these central themes, literature on EFL teaching was also examined. Moreover, research on adolescence and the developmental characteristics of this stage, particularly within the Argentine context, was incorporated to supplement and reinforce the conceptual reflections discussed throughout the study. This dual lens (SEL × EFL) frames the central contribution of this thesis: translating broad SEL principles into conditions that enable adolescent communicative and collaborative work in this context.

This critical process made it possible to identify and explain existing gaps in the SEL literature. Among these, the limited integration of SEL in pedagogical practice emerged as particularly notable. Given that one of the specific objectives of this thesis was to propose practical strategies that foster SEL, communication, and collaboration in the EFL classroom, this gap provided both a rationale and an opportunity for theoretical exploration. Throughout the study, several guiding questions informed the analysis: Which SEL-based strategies could benefit EFL teachers? How might these strategies be implemented to enhance communication and collaboration? And in what ways can SEL support teachers in gaining deeper insights into their adolescent students?

By analysing and integrating insights from these main dimensions of the thesis — SEL, EFL teaching, and communication and collaboration within these contexts — it was possible to establish a meaningful connection between SEL and the English language teaching-learning process, with particular consideration of adolescent students. Furthermore, this integrative review provided a deeper understanding of the role of SEL among adolescents, and of its implications for Argentine students.

Building on these ideas, the study demonstrated that the most suitable role of SEL in the enhancement of communication and collaboration skills in the EFL classroom lies in the creation of a supportive and affirming learning environment, one through which these relationship and linguistic skills can be safely cultivated among adolescent learners. As previously discussed, in such contexts — where students must be willing to take risks, experiment with language, and often feel vulnerable — SEL serves as the foundation upon which all other learning processes are built. In other words, it functions as a cornerstone for the development of additional skills and for the construction of classroom environments that actively engage and motivate students while sustaining their personal and linguistic growth.

In sum, this first part of the conclusion has restated the objectives of the study and has shown how each was addressed through a conceptual and pedagogical approach. By revisiting the guiding research questions and the identified gap in literature, it has been made

clear that this thesis sought to connect SEL with EFL in order to strengthen communication and collaboration skills among adolescent learners. The following section builds upon these foundations by summarizing the main findings and contributions that have emerged from this theoretical exploration.

Summary of Main Findings and Contributions

Expanding on the preceding discussion, this section presents a synthesis of the main findings and contributions derived from the study. It revisits the core dimensions examined throughout the thesis — namely, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), communication and collaboration skills, and English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms — in order to highlight their interconnections and pedagogical implications. The following subsections summarise how the conceptual and pedagogical exploration conducted has contributed to understanding (a) the significance of SEL in education, (b) its relationship with communication and collaboration, (c) its relevance among adolescents and in EFL contexts, (d) the teacher’s role in fostering SEL-based environments, and (e) practical strategies that can support its implementation in face-to-face EFL classrooms.

Describing SEL and its Role in Education

Understanding the role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) within education is essential to situating its potential in EFL contexts. Before addressing its specific connection with communication and collaboration, it is necessary to recall the broader educational relevance of SEL and the benefits that underpin its integration.

Research has consistently demonstrated that integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into education yields numerous benefits, making its incorporation into school curricula a priority at both local and global levels (Goleman, 1989; Durlak, 2022; UNESCO, 2020; CASEL, n.d.). Given its significance, social and emotional competencies are now regarded as essential skills for global citizenship in the 21st century (Mercer et al., 2020).

These competencies equip students not only to succeed academically but also to navigate complex interpersonal and cultural environments.

Prioritising SEL contributes to students' social and emotional well-being as well as to their cognitive development and academic success (Immordino-Yang, 2019). In education, attending to this dimension results in more engaged and motivated learners, leading to improved academic outcomes and to more meaningful and transformative school experiences. Within the EFL classroom, this becomes particularly significant, as emotional safety and engagement are essential conditions for linguistic risk-taking and authentic communication. Consequently, SEL does not merely accompany language learning — it enables it.

On the whole, SEL can be viewed as a pedagogical foundation that supports both human development and effective learning, establishing the conditions upon which communication and collaboration can later be cultivated.

Connecting SEL with Communication and Collaboration

Having established the significance of SEL within education, it becomes essential to consider how its principles interact with the core processes of learning itself. Among these, communication and collaboration stand out as particularly relevant, both as objectives of language education and as means through which SEL competencies are enacted in daily classroom life.

As discussed throughout this thesis, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provides a foundation for developing core interpersonal competencies, particularly communication and collaboration. These two skills, central to SEL frameworks, also occupy a prominent place in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where approaches such as task-based learning, teaching unplugged, and communicative methodologies seek to promote them (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Harmer, 2015).

By analysing SEL and EFL perspectives on these skills, this thesis has shown their deep interrelation: genuine communication and collaboration emerge when learners are active, engaged, and emotionally invested in their own learning. This implies not only offering challenging and meaningful academic content but also fostering emotional engagement — something that SEL explicitly addresses. Thus, SEL in EFL should be embedded within communicative tasks — not added as standalone blocks — so language time remains central while relational skills grow.

Viewed in relation to one another, these ideas reveal how other SEL competencies — such as active listening, empathy, self-awareness, and social awareness — can enhance communication and collaboration, or conversely, how their absence can hinder them. Additionally, since both communication and collaboration involve risk-taking, students need to feel safe and supported to participate fully. In this sense, SEL proves essential: by cultivating supportive and affirming learning environments, it lays the foundation for more significant learning experiences and for more authentic communication and collaboration in the target language.

Considering these aspects, communication and collaboration not only reflect but also depend on learners' social and emotional capacities. Through SEL, these abilities are strengthened in ways that extend beyond language use, shaping more connected, confident, and empathetic learners. This connection becomes especially meaningful during adolescence and within EFL classrooms, where social interaction and emotional safety are vital for engagement and growth.

SEL among Adolescents and in EFL Contexts

Understanding adolescence as a stage of profound transformation is essential to situating the role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) within educational practice. This subsection revisits key insights about adolescent development to clarify how the particular characteristics of this period intersect with the aims of SEL and EFL instruction.

This thesis describes adolescence and highlights that this phase represents a new window of opportunity for brain growth. It has been explained how, during this period, adolescents are highly susceptible to environmental influences, which underscores the significance of this stage and becomes particularly relevant for analysing the role that SEL could play in enhancing communication and collaboration skills in EFL classrooms.

The interrelation between adolescents' development and the environmental factors that shape it clearly demonstrates how the social, emotional, and biological dimensions are closely connected. The implications of this in EFL classrooms — and in education in general — are profound, as they reveal the need to view students as holistic beings whose dimensions are constantly interacting. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to engage them by acknowledging their integral nature and by approaching teaching and learning from a holistic perspective.

After a thorough analysis, it should also be claimed that although adolescents' immediate social and emotional environment largely shapes their attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions, a broader understanding of context is equally necessary. This includes considering the time and space in which they develop. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that Argentine adolescent students and their needs differ from those of students in other countries. This thesis addressed these contextual specificities by examining national reports, educational policies, and legal frameworks related to adolescence and education in Argentina.

Such considerations lead to a more comprehensive understanding of EFL classrooms in the Argentine context. For Argentine students in particular — who often have limited access to extracurricular support — these classrooms become the main environments in which SEL competencies can be acquired and practised. Moreover, they reinforce the relevance of SEL in fostering both well-being and English language learning.

All things considered, analysing adolescence through the lens of SEL provides valuable insight into how emotional, social, and contextual factors shape learning. Recognising these dynamics allows educators to adapt EFL practices in ways that respond to students' developmental needs while strengthening both their linguistic and socio-emotional growth.

The Teacher's Role: Modelling, Climate, and Context

Throughout this study, it has become evident that teachers occupy a pivotal position in translating the principles of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into classroom practice. Their presence, attitudes, and interactions directly shape the social and emotional climate of the learning environment.

The integration of all the perspectives explored in this thesis reinforces the notion that teachers play a pivotal role in the development of students' social and emotional skills. They model behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes — both consciously and unconsciously — that influence not only how students learn but also how they relate to one another. Consequently, teachers are key agents in shaping and sustaining the classroom climate. Their presence, empathy, and ability to foster connection lay the foundations for a supportive and affirming learning environment in which students feel encouraged to participate, share experiences, and grow together.

For EFL teachers, this role acquires particular significance. Teaching a language— an inherently social act — extends beyond transmitting linguistic knowledge; it involves cultivating the interpersonal and emotional skills that enable authentic communication. Empathy, active listening, and social awareness should therefore be nurtured alongside language skills. To achieve this, teachers themselves need to develop these competencies and approach their practice holistically, viewing students as integrated social, emotional, and cognitive beings.

In the Argentine context, however, teachers often face structural and contextual challenges — economic constraints, social instability, and the pressures of adolescents’ changing realities — that may limit their capacity to implement SEL effectively. Nevertheless, small, intentional actions — such as fostering reflection, dialogue, and trust — can still promote meaningful learning. Teachers thus play a decisive role in sustaining environments that nurture both language development and emotional well-being.

Ultimately, the teacher’s role stands at the intersection of pedagogy, emotion, and context. As this thesis has demonstrated, meaningful integration of SEL in EFL classrooms depends not only on sound methodology but also on the teacher’s ability to model emotional intelligence, foster authentic relationships, and create learning spaces where both language and personal growth can flourish.

Practical Strategies

Following the discussion on the teacher’s role in fostering SEL, it is also essential to consider how these principles can be translated into classroom practice. In this regard, it has been demonstrated that Social and Emotional Learning should not be left to chance. Developing these competencies among adolescent students requires coordinated efforts from teachers, schools, families, and the broader educational system — a challenge that nonetheless offers great potential for transformation.

By connecting EFL classrooms with SEL and communication and collaboration skills, this thesis has proposed a series of practical strategies aimed at building affirming and supportive learning environments. Although not all the strategies analysed originated within the SEL framework, clear relationships were established to show how each of them can foster conditions conducive to learning. Strategies such as group-building activities, ice-breakers, collaborative tasks, empathy-oriented routines, and brain breaks illustrate how classroom practices can simultaneously promote engagement, trust, and connection.

Taken together, these practices reveal that meaningful progress can be made within the classroom to engage students both emotionally and cognitively. More importantly, they demonstrate that social and emotional skills and English language learning can — and should — be developed in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Contributions

Building on the synthesis of findings presented above, the following section explicitly highlights the theoretical, practical, and teacher education contributions of this study.

Theoretically, this thesis demonstrates how social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies underpin communication and collaboration and interact with adolescents' social, emotional, and cognitive development. Central to this contribution is the understanding that SEL enhances these skills by building a supportive and affirming learning environment, fostering engagement, risk-taking, and authentic participation. The study also draws attention to the caveats, gaps, and challenges of SEL as a theoretical framework. In addition, it situates key insights within the adolescent stage and the Argentine educational context, emphasising the importance of developmental and cultural factors — particularly for secondary EFL classrooms in Argentina.

Practically, the thesis offers strategies for EFL teachers to intentionally foster communication and collaboration in ways that support SEL principles. Thus, it has attempted to bridge the gap between SEL theory and classroom application. Practices such as group-building activities, ice-breakers, collaborative tasks, and empathy-oriented routines illustrate how these approaches cultivate emotional engagement, trust, and connection while promoting language learning.

Finally, the research highlights the pivotal role of teachers in fostering SEL-informed learning environments. It emphasises how teachers can model social and emotional competencies, create supportive classroom climates, and respond to contextual and

developmental challenges, demonstrating the centrality of their presence and actions in promoting communication, collaboration, and student well-being.

Limitations of the Study

While the aforementioned contributions highlight the significance and applicability of the findings of this thesis, it is also essential to acknowledge the limitations that may have influenced the research outcomes. These are discussed below.

First, this study has focused on the role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in enhancing communication and collaboration skills among adolescent students in face-to-face English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms. This focus inherently involves several limitations.

On the one hand, the exclusive emphasis on face-to-face EFL settings defines both the scope and boundaries of this research. Consequently, since the insights and conclusions are closely tied to the EFL field, the findings and proposed strategies cannot be directly generalized to other educational contexts.

On the other hand, this study has examined how SEL may enhance communication and collaboration skills—two of the social and emotional competencies outlined in CASEL’s framework. Other SEL competencies were not addressed in depth, although they were discussed in relation to communication and collaboration to illustrate how fostering one dimension can, in turn, nurture the others.

Regarding the age group considered, this thesis focuses specifically on adolescent students. Although the discussion has drawn on general characteristics of adolescence, it does not account for more specific subgroups — for instance, adolescents with disabilities — thus limiting its applicability. In addition, while reference has been made to adolescent learners in Argentina, stronger and more explicit connections should be established between SEL and the Argentine context, and even more so between SEL and specific regional contexts or types

of institutions (e.g., public vs. private schools; schools vs. private English institutions) and classrooms (e.g., large vs. small ones). The broadness of this scope makes it difficult to determine whether the ideas presented can be equally applied across these diverse educational settings.

Another important limitation lies in the study's methodological design. The research adopted a qualitative approach grounded in an extensive review of relevant academic and scientific literature, without incorporating empirical data to substantiate the claims made. Although the review was comprehensive — drawing on up-to-date articles and books — empirical evidence would provide further insight and a more robust foundation for the arguments presented.

Additionally, while the role of the teacher has been examined, no specific reference was made to teachers within the Argentine context, nor to local teacher training programmes or practices. This omission represents another area for potential exploration.

Overall, the scope of the study remains broad, and future research would benefit from narrowing it further. This work has not been able to bridge certain gaps — such as the measurement or direct observation of SEL in schools and EFL classrooms — which, as previously noted, remains particularly scarce in Argentina. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable theoretical insights into the potential of SEL to enhance communication and collaboration skills within EFL classrooms. Recognising these constraints not only clarifies the scope of the current work but also highlights promising directions for future research — especially the need for empirical studies and locally grounded applications that could extend and validate the present findings.

Further Research

Building on the limitations identified in this study, several directions for future research can be suggested. First, future studies could adopt empirical or mixed-method approaches to examine how the practical ideas proposed in this thesis operate in real

classroom settings. Observing, recording, and analysing the implementation of these strategies would provide evidence to support and refine the theoretical claims presented here.

Further research could also extend the scope by exploring other SEL competencies beyond communication and collaboration, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the various dimensions of SEL interact and contribute to students' social and emotional development within EFL classrooms.

It would be valuable to broaden the participant base, including adolescents with disabilities or learners from diverse socio-economic, regional or cultural backgrounds, and students at other educational levels, such as primary or university settings. This would allow for more inclusive insights and determine whether the strategies proposed here are effective across different student populations.

Additionally, future studies should examine the role of teachers within the Argentine context, considering local teacher training programmes, institutional conditions, and educators' perspectives on SEL. Such research could illuminate the factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of SEL principles into EFL classrooms.

Finally, comparative studies across different types of schools, such as public versus private or urban versus rural institutions, would help to determine how contextual factors influence the effectiveness of SEL-based interventions.

To conclude, pursuing these lines of inquiry would strengthen the empirical foundation of the field and support the application of SEL frameworks in Argentine and other EFL contexts, ensuring that the theoretical contributions of this thesis are translated into practical, context-sensitive classroom strategies.

Final Reflections

Since Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has been the main subject of my thesis, it may not be surprising that my own learning throughout this writing process has also been social and emotional. For this reason, and in honour of everything explored in this study, these final reflections delve not only into the academic thoughts that emerged during its development but also into the social and emotional experiences that, in one way or another, shaped this research.

From an academic standpoint, this thesis may be viewed as a contribution to both EFL pedagogy and Social and Emotional Learning. It aimed to analyse the role that the latter plays in the enhancement of communication and collaboration skills among adolescent students in face-to-face English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms. By integrating insights from these perspectives, it is possible to claim that one of SEL's main functions in this context is to build an affirming and supportive environment that lays the foundations for students to take risks, participate, and share with others.

From a personal perspective, however, this thesis has been a journey of self-discovery, uniting my EFL teacher and student selves into one. As a professional, I can say that I have been interested in SEL since the very beginning of my teacher training course. As a result, this in-depth study has broadened my understanding and helped me grow as a teacher. As a student — and, nowadays, as a student in the Licenciatura programme, supported by two passionate and caring teachers, Eugenia Cossini and María Inés Capurro de Castelli, for whose guidance and mentorship I am truly grateful — I have even more to say. From a very young age, I have experienced what it means to have teachers who take into account their students' well-being, interests, and attitudes towards both learning and others. One of my earliest examples was Miss Mariela Muñoz Osorio, my English primary school teacher, who taught me what it feels like to be genuinely seen and cared for in the classroom. Throughout my secondary and university education, I was fortunate to encounter other teachers who, like her, not only aimed to transmit academic content to help me improve as a

student but who also truly valued me and saw me as a person — or, using more precise language, as a holistic being. I believe this is what led me to become deeply interested in the subject matter of my research paper.

As I have attempted to show, the writing process has not only enriched me professionally but also allowed me to reconnect with the learner I once was — and still am. Harmer (2015), among many other figures in the EFL field, has claimed — and rightly so — that learning a language is inherently social. After writing this thesis, I dare to say that learning *anything* is inherently social and emotional as well. That is a huge responsibility that, as teachers, we should always bear in mind. It means that when we truly observe our classes, when we consider our students' social and emotional dimensions, and when we consciously build an affirming and supportive learning environment, we are positively influencing our students' learning and well-being.

I have also realised that integrating Social and Emotional Learning may seem difficult. We need a framework, we need to develop those skills ourselves first, and we need to record them in our lesson plans. However, since every classroom experience — even completing a photocopy — sparks an emotion, I believe we should always try, even if we have to improvise (which, more often than not, is the case), to spark *positive* emotions in the EFL classroom.

This thesis allowed me to understand more deeply the importance of certain activities and routines, and it also brought new ideas, challenges, and questions. For instance: How could we measure this in real life? Do these practices always work in the classroom? Where is the limit of SEL — does that limit even exist? Is it possible to clearly separate SEL and EFL? These are questions I do not yet have answers to. However, I believe that we should always attempt to integrate SEL principles. Each group is unique; each may be supportive and affirming in a different way. One strategy may work with one group and not with another — but it is always worth trying.

Kaplan (2022) asserted that classrooms are great places for students to develop *dispositions to feel*. Osher et al. (2020), Cantor et al. (2019) Immordino-Yang (2019) showed the importance of the environment in fostering them, while Brown (2014) emphasised the need for an empathetic and caring space that enables risk-taking and communication in EFL classrooms, especially for adolescent students whose heightened concern for peer approval and identity formation makes them more vulnerable. To achieve this — even if teachers are not formally trained in SEL, as is often the case — I believe we should still put it into practice. Even when we feel we have not yet developed these skills fully, sometimes the other members of the group — our students, whom I would also like to thank and acknowledge — help pave the way.

In conclusion, this thesis represents not only a professional achievement but also a process of personal growth. Communicating and collaborating in the EFL classroom may be challenging for some students. It is for this reason — and because I have learned, through various models, to selflessly care about students — that I believe SEL can make a difference by regarding learners from a holistic point of view. Applying strategies that embody SEL principles can help build an affirming and supportive learning environment where students feel more confident and, if we are lucky, willing to play and experiment with the language.

What is more, as teachers engaged in an ethical act, we would be, as Kaplan (2022) posits, reclaiming the right to tenderness in education — a right that directly strengthens what she calls *affective justice*. Although this concept was not explicitly explored in previous sections, I find it deeply resonant with the principles that guided this study. It implies recognising affection as a foundational principle for the organisation of human coexistence within the school. In doing so, emotionality transcends the private realm, asserting itself in the public sphere as a right rooted in justice. It becomes essential, then, to reaffirm the inherent social nature of emotions. *Affective justice*, in this sense, invites children and young people to exercise their right to love — to receive love, to love themselves, and to extend love to others. In this light, SEL can be understood as a path towards affective justice — a

pedagogical way of nurturing empathy, care, and connection that dignifies both teaching and learning.

As a final thought, Sir Ken Robinson (2015, p. 17) reminds us:

Revolutions do not wait for legislation. They emerge from what people do at ground level. Education doesn't happen in the committee rooms of the legislatures or in the rhetoric of politicians. It's what goes on between learners and teachers in actual schools.

These words capture the essence of why I care about my teaching. Every interaction, every lesson, is part of an ongoing process that fosters growth, empathy, and connection. Social and Emotional Learning, as I hope this thesis has demonstrated, is an indispensable ally in creating this transformative, "revolutionary" space that is the classroom.

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Appendix A

Information about SEL Priority Policy Developed within the Framework of the Strategic Plan Buenos Aires Aprende, Promoted by the City's Ministry of Education



Appendix B

The Cambridge Framework for Life Competencies



Appendix C

Some Research and Programmes Carried Out in Argentina

- Gonzalez, R., Arroniz, L., & Parra-Bolaños, N. (2023). ¿Existe un perfil emocional en adolescentes según su sexo?. *Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar*, 7(2): 627-645. https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v7i2.5344
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Appendix D

The CASEL GUIDE to SCHOOLWIDE SEL, ESSENTIALS, A Printable

Compilation of Key Activities and Tools for School Teams



Appendix E

Self-Assessing Educator Social and Emotional Competencies and Instruction

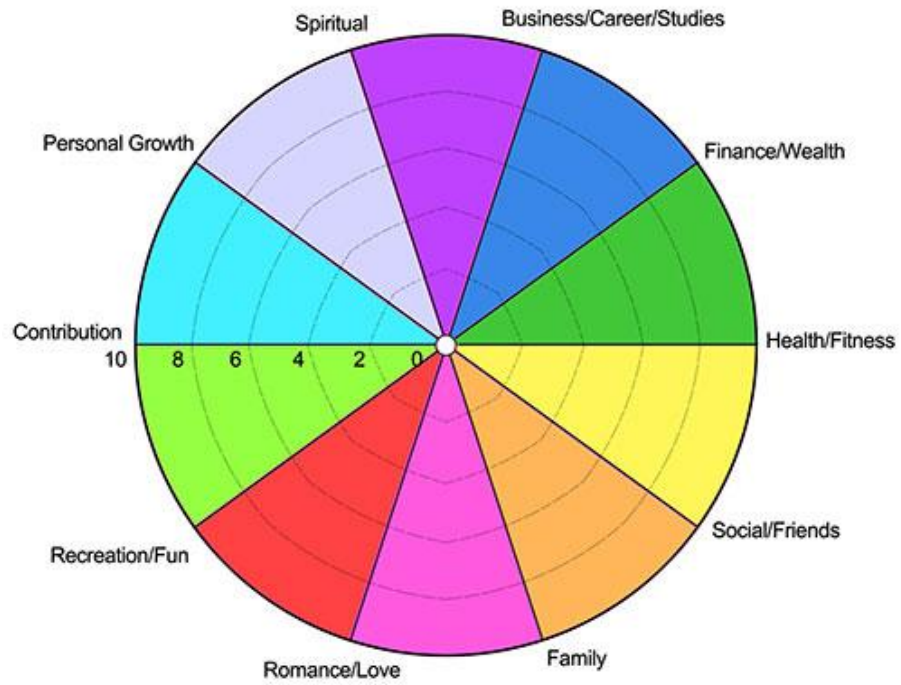
(Refreshed), Nicholas Yoder (2022)



Appendix F

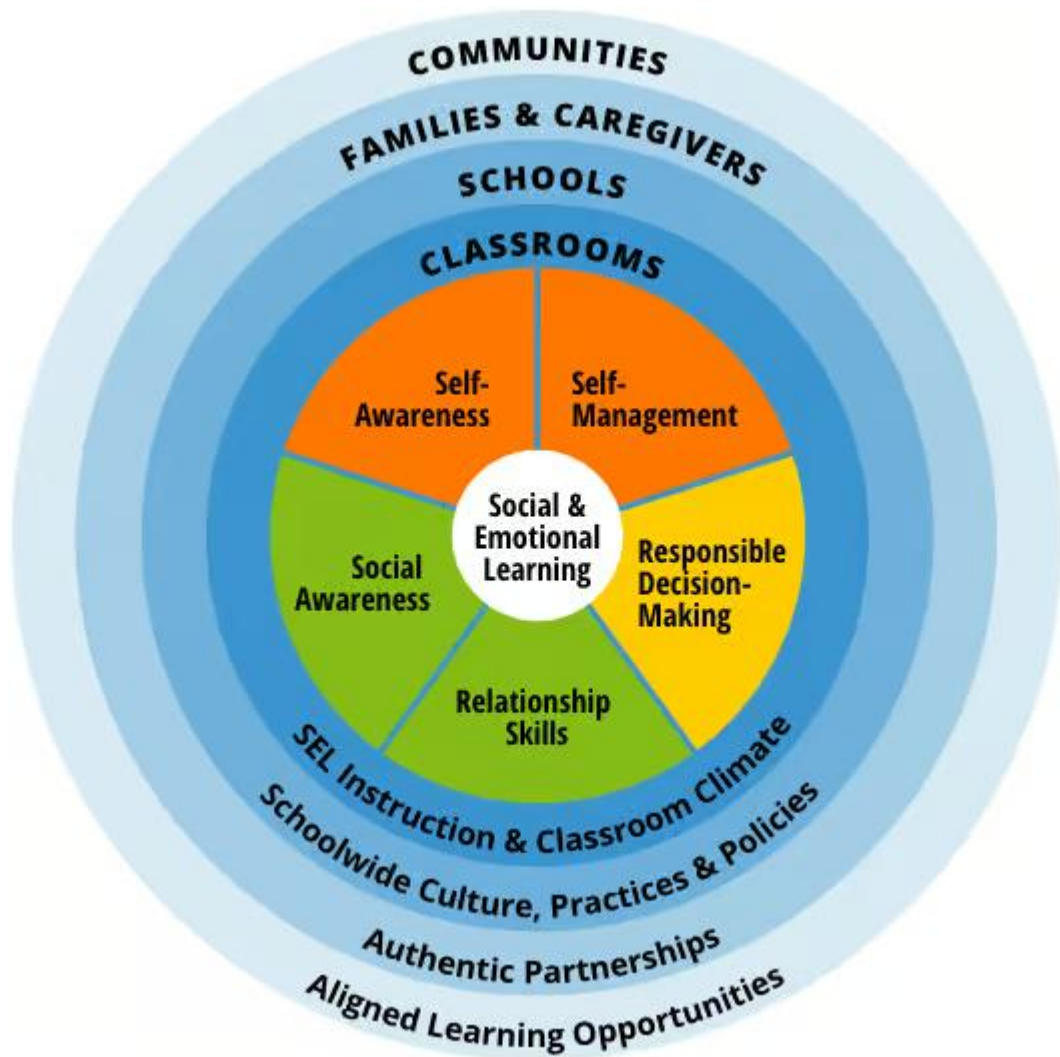
The Wheel of Life

My Life Wheel



Appendix G

CASEL's Framework



Appendix H

Sample of Lesson Plans

