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**Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into Junior  
High School English Curriculums to Enhances Learning  
Motivation**

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# Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into Junior High School English Curriculums to Enhance Learning Motivation

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### *Abstract*

Due to the paradigm shift to focus more on competency building in the field of education, the definition of learning has been expanded from the mere acquisition of knowledge to the cultivation of competencies (OECD, 2019). Through Social Emotional Learning (SEL), students could attend to their emotions and cultivate their full potential (Jeng, 2017). The purpose of this action research (AR) study is to investigate how SEL can enhance junior high school students' motivation to learn English. This research proposal is divided into three sections: motivation, literature review on SEL and the Dörnyei's motivation model (1998) and methodology including the pedagogical design and the data collection plan. This study adopts the principles of AR for individual teacher-researcher to evaluate both students' motivation changes and learning and the instructor's practices. A set of three SEL-integrated lesson plans will be carried out to explore the application of SEL strategies. In addition, Dörnyei's motivation model serves as the analytical tool to document the changes of students' motivation. The data collection tools include worksheets, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews to explore students' learning and their opinions of SEL lessons. The teacher-researcher's field notes will also be analyzed for triangulation. The results of data analysis could serve as suggestions for researchers and practitioners who are interested in implementing SEL in the EFL context like

Taiwan.

### *Motivation & Research Questions*

#### **Motivation**

SEL in Taiwan is not yet a common practice in schools, but gaining a lot more attention nowadays, for it is essential for teachers and practitioners to know why and how SEL should be implemented into the curriculums. Students not only need to learn the knowledge from textbooks but also learn how to establish a healthy relationship with others and truly understand their own values. SEL can assist students to thrive in society. The target participants in this project are junior high school students because adolescents are developing their identities and further connecting with society (Chickering et al., 1993). Then, SEL can intervene students' learning and assist junior high school students to know who they are, how to manage their emotions, and how to cooperate with people of different backgrounds, for these five core elements address the major issues they would need to face, including self-awareness, self-management, relationship skill, responsible decision making, and social behavior. In addition, SEL can enhance students' academic success, reduce behavioral problems, release emotional distress, and encourage positive social behaviors (Options for Youth, n.d., 2016). Therefore, with appropriate implementation, SEL can effectively guide junior high school students to overcome self-doubt and improve well-being in the long term.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What issues do English teachers need to consider when integrating SEL into the Taiwanese English curriculum of secondary education?
2. How does the application of SEL enhance Taiwanese junior high school students' English learning motivation?

#### *Literature Reviews*

## Definition and Benefits of SEL, and Dörnyei's Motivation Model (1998).

Understanding the definition of SEL is for teachers to know what the values of SEL are and what kinds of effects students will have after SEL. Then, the benefits of SEL can let teachers know the importances of SEL for students, so they will be more willing to implement SEL into their curriculum. The purpose to adopt Dörnyei's Motivation Model is to help this project evaluate whether students' learning motivation enhance or not and know what kinds of learning process they go through.

### **Definition of SEL**

According to Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL refers to a comprehensive set of competences for students to improve both their human development and education (2020). SEL can be divided into five different phases which are Self-awareness, Self- Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness. SEL focuses from their own self to big social communities. Therefore, in the first phase, Self-awareness, it is the ability for their own self to understand their own emotions, thoughts, values, and "how they influence behavior across contexts" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, n.d.). Then, into the next phase, which is Self-management, it is the ability of "managing their own emotions, thoughts and behaviors effectively in different situations and achieving goals and aspirations." In the third phases, Responsible Decision Making, the ability for students is going through the choice-making process being able to be more considerate and constructive toward their personal behavior or social interaction in different situations. Then, into the fourth phase, Relationship Skills, it is the ability to "establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups". In the final phase, Social Awareness, the students can understand and embrace different points of views and empathize with others,

including the people from different cultures, backgrounds, and contexts.

### **Benefits of SEL**

Through SEL, it not only helps students know how to regulate their emotions but also improves students' academic performances. According to Durlak et al. (2011), it shows the statistics to prove that after learning SEL strategies, they enhance the SEL skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors, have less conduct problems and emotional distress, and improve their academic performance (p. 413). These benefits can be put into four major categories, including academic success, fewer behavioral problems, less emotional distress, and positive social behaviors (Options for Youth, n.d.).

Addressing academic success, in the meta-analysis, it shows that the academic performance of the students who learn SEL skills could boost achievement by 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., p. 417). Regarding to students' having fewer behavioral problems, they will have 10% fewer aggressive behavioral or psychological problems when they arrive at 25 years old, since they will know how to express their feelings in a more appropriate way. Then, the benefits of less emotional distress are based on the skills of self-management, so they can regulate their own emotions and know how to use stress management to help them overcome depression and anxiety. The final one is positive social behavior. This benefit will help students have a good and healthy relationship with their family, teachers, friends, and even this community. Therefore, it can assist students being more willing to engage into group life instead of withdrawing into sole life.

These SEL competencies are all correlated to each other (Durlak et. al, 2011, p. 417). For example, if students are more self-aware, they will recognize themselves better and be confident about their strength and weakness of their academic performances so that they can evaluate themselves in order to set a suitable academic

goal (p. 417). Moreover, when students meet the challenges, they will know how to manage their own stress and exhibit more self-discipline and self-motivation to accomplish their own tasks (p. 418). To sum up, SEL can help students gradually become a holistic person and improve their academic performances.

### **The Implement of Social Emotional Learning into Lesson Plan**

Even though there have been quite a lot of resources on SEL, yet how to effectively integrate SEL into the EFL learning has not yet been reported that extensively, a gap this study aims to fill. Examples of SEL in Middle School Social Studies Instruction (2017) advises for teachers to include the historical events and figures, or social studies driving student learning engagement (p.2). Through these events, students can try to identify the feelings and imagine how those feelings would affect others (p.3). Importantly, it is also suggested that teachers should give the opportunities for students to reflect on their studies and should provide the authentic feedback to the students' responses (p.3). Moreover, teachers should also establish the class roles and responsibilities that emphasizes the students' strengths, weaknesses, and their group goals. These methods can train students' SEL skills so that they know how to practice SEL into real life situations.

Since Taiwan is a EFL learning context, it is important to refer to SEL lesson plans for EFL teachers and understand how the EFL teachers implement SEL into their own courses. Pentón Herrera (2020) reported three methods of SEL for teaching EFL students, including Mindfulness, Peace Education, and Restorative Practice. Mindfulness can assist students to focus on what they are doing in the moment and to differentiate and release the unnecessary things. Then, Peace Education teaches students how to prevent and solve the conflict justically and respectfully (p.9). The final one is Restorative Practice, which can help students “to reduce crime, violence and bullying, to improve human behaviors, to strengthen civil society, to provide



effective leadership, to restore relationships, and to repair harm” (p.10). Therefore, these methods can promote students’ empathy, building and maintaining strong, respectful relationships, and practicing justice.

### **The Motivation Model (Dörnyei, 1998)**

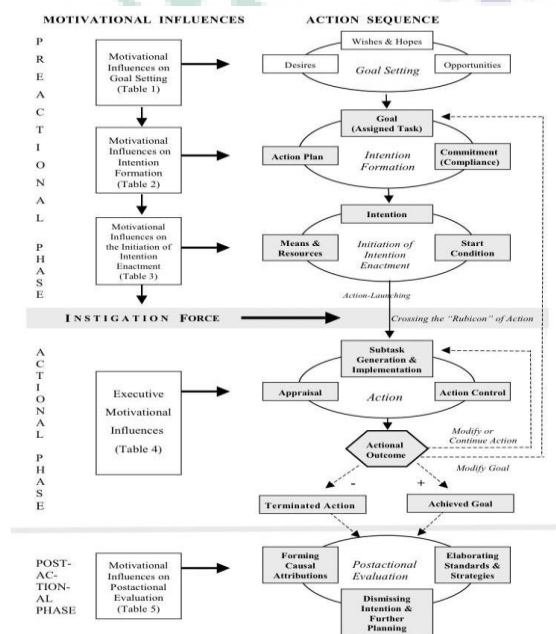
This study plans to adopt Dörnyei’s motivation model (1998) as an analytical tool to evaluate students’ development in terms of motivation to learn English, since they would gain a deeper understanding of themselves throughout the process of learning. As a result, they might be willing to spend more time on English learning, start to make a study plan for themselves and show more responsibility to themselves and other people. Based on the Dörnyei’s model provided below (Figure 1), the process of teaching and learning is divided into three phases: pre-active phase, actional phase, and post-active phase, and the SEL theory would be integrated into all three phases.

The beginning of pre-actional phase is important for EFL learners to set a goal which is “the engine to fire the action and provide the direction in which to act” (p. 47). The goal setting includes the learners’ wish, hopes, desires, and opportunity, but coming to “intention,” the goal should involve the “commitment” into it so that learners will be more “compliance” to their goal (p. 49). Therefore, connected to the first and second phases of SEL, self-awareness and self-management, students not only could know more about their thoughts, values, and emotions, but also manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors better in order to comply with their goals.

SEL can cultivate students’ logical thinking in general, as they generate an “action plan” which will implement the time and a “start condition” comprehensively (p. 50). However, the intention enactment should have the “means and resources”, for it may occur that the means and resources cannot fulfill the intention so that the means and resources are essential for the intention enactment (p. 49). Moreover, the

starting condition is that the learners will set a time and determine the order of the enactment because it is important to organize all the intentions in mind (p. 49). Then, linking to the SEL theory, students' responsible decision-making will be trained because they need to evaluate whether the benefits and consequences of their action are caring and constructive or not in different situations. Furthermore, when they start to practice their actions, based on the relationship skills and social awareness of SEL, they also need to learn how to cooperate and establish a healthy relationship with others in order to understand and empathize with them. The final one is the post-actional phase. In this phase, students need to evaluate their results no matter whether their plans are accomplished or terminated. If the plan fails, they need to go back to the pre-actional phase to replace the old wishes, goals, and intentions with the new one. As a result, the integration of SEL and Dörnyei's motivation model (1998) can document changes in students' learning motivation through SEL theory in this project.

**Figure 1 Dörnyei's (1998) Motivation Model**

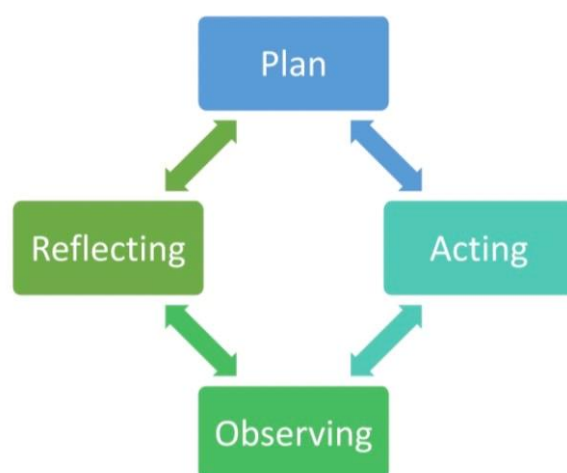


## *Methodology*

This project adopts the individual teacher-researcher of AR (2000). Teachers will focus on the single issue in the classroom and seek the situations to improve the students' performances. Then, the stages of AR processes are presented in Figure 2.

The cycle of AR will be “to develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening, to act to implement the plan, to observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs, and to reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and so on, through a succession of cycles” (Kemmis et. al, 2004 pp.61-68). Therefore, following this AR process, the researcher will design the lesson plans, put them into practice, observe the situations, and analyze and reflect on the teaching and the set of data collected.

**Figure 2 Action Research Cycle (Kemmis et. al, 2004)**



### **Pedagogical Design**

The lesson plans adopt two picture books to integrate the SEL strategies (Table 1). The target learners are 7th to 8th grade students in a public junior high school in northern Taiwan, and their English levels are at or below CEFR B1, so with colorful illustrations with the text, picture books can more easily draw their attention to English learning.

1. Picture book: *Crying is Like the Rain* (Feinberg & Kellogg, 2021)

Learning competencies of SEL: Self- awareness, self-management, responsible decision making

Learning objectives: Speaking, Writing, and Listening

The purpose: This picture book can assist students to realize their own emotions and to know that expressing their emotion is a acceptable and normal thing to do.

**Table 1 Lesson Plan with Major Tasks**

Total: 50 min	Lesson plan
10 min	<p>Introduction + <b>Warm up</b></p> <p><b>Warm up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Asking questions</b></li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Short greeting: How do you feel right now?</li> <li>2. What kind of situation will make you cry?</li> <li>3. When you feel like crying, whom would you talk to?</li> </ol>
40 min	<p>Storytelling (p.1-26)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10 min storytelling</li> <li>- 10 min comprehension check (1): <b>Asking Questions</b></li> <li>- 10 min storytelling</li> <li>- 10 min comprehension check (2): <b>Playing the Emotional Wheel</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Asking Questions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If you saw your friend crying, what would you do?</li> </ol>

	<p>2. After listening to the answers from your classmates, do you still want to cry in front of your friends or alone?</p> <p><b>Playing emotional wheel</b></p> <p>1. Teacher provides four different scenarios to students to differentiate the sad, mad, happy, and scared emotions.</p> <p>2. Teacher will prepare a worksheet providing some emotional vocabulary.</p>
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Total:50 min	Second Period of Class
20 min	<p>10 min storytelling</p> <p>10 min comprehension check (3): The Story Arrangement</p> <p><b>The Story Arrangement:</b></p> <p>1. Teacher will separate the story and students need to rearrange it.</p> <p>2. Selecting one page that they think important in this story and explaining the reasons to their classmates</p>
30 min	<p>Phrase/sentence pattern + vocabulary:</p> <p>- 20 min explaining phrase/sentence pattern + vocabulary:</p> <p>Asking each group of students to find the vocabulary and phrases from the picture book and to fill out the answers on the worksheet that only provides Chinese.</p> <p>- 10 min game:</p>

	only one student will stand in front of the classroom and this student will know the vocabulary that the teacher told secretly, and the rest of the classmates need to guess the word.
5 min	Wrap up

2. Picture book: *Where Are You from?* (Méndez & Kim, 2019)

Learning competencies of SEL: Self-awareness, social behavior, and relationship skills

Learning objectives: Speaking, writing, and listening

The purpose: this picture book can assist students to find their own identity and to make the connection with their own.

**Table 2. Lesson Plan with Major Tasks**

Total:50min	Lesson Plan
15 min	Vocabulary + phrase
25 min	storytelling
10 min	Activity (1): <b>The Story Arrangement</b>

Total:50min	Second Period of Class
10 min	Storytelling In Conclusion
20 min	Introducing Taiwanese geography and attractions
20 min	Activity (2): Creative work <b>Creative work:</b> Teacher will use scaffolding instruction to provide a short paragraph about introducing students' hometown to other foreigners. Then, students can fill their responses into the blanks.

***Data Collection***

The data collection tools to evaluate the effectiveness of SEL integration and students' learning motivation consist of both quantitative and qualitative data, including interviews and surveys for students and teachers.

### **Quantitative Data**

The participants are 21 Xinchuang Junior High School students in total, and they are 7th and 8th grade students. These questionnaires would be delivered to students after each lesson ending, there are 8 questions for each lesson which can be divided into three sections. The first one is asking students' perspective of the curriculum mapping and teaching process. The second section is understanding which parts of the curriculum are their favorite one. The final section is investigating whether students' attitudes toward English learning are changed after the courses and whether these two courses can enhance their learning motivation.

### **Qualitative Data**

The participants are 5 interviewees. There are three teachers. First, Teacher A is New Taipei Municipal Xinchuang Junior High School classroom teacher, second, Teacher B is a junior high school teacher teaching in the cram school who won the second prize in the competition of junior high school lesson plan design this year, and Teacher C is a National Hsinchu Senior High School classroom teacher. Moreover, there are two New Taipei Municipal Xinchuang Junior High School students who are Student A and B. The mode of interviews was operated in online, and the length of each interview took thirty minutes to one hour. The amounts of the questions include ten to twenty questions. Addressing the questions for teachers, it can be divided into three sections followed by Dorney's motivation model: pre-actional, actional, and post-actional phase. Therefore, in the first section, it investigates that how students' learning motivation is and how the teacher assists them to set the goal for learning English before the SEL classes start. Then, the second section explores whether students' attitude toward English change, how students interact with their classmates to accomplish the work and what their action is. The final section focuses on whether students finish their goal or not and if not, how they would react. Addressing to the

students' interviews, it can be split into three sections as well. The first section is to investigate what their attitudes toward English are before they learned these courses. Second, it is to understand which courses they were fonder of. Third, it is to explore whether students can be motivated by these courses to learn English.

### ***Finding & Discussion***

#### **Finding**

##### **Research Question 1**

According to the result of the questionnaire, there are 52 percent of students who prefer the storytelling part, 19 percent of students who prefer the activity part, and 29 percent of students who prefer the introduction of vocabulary, sentence patterns, and phrases in lesson one and two. Then, the results demonstrate that students are fond of the storytelling part. The student interviewees also mention that they would be attracted by the picture books which have colorful images. In addition, Teacher A replies that group work or creative project can train students' problem-solving ability and he also observes that these activities can make students engage more in the classes (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Addressing Teacher B and C's interview, in actional phase, they reply that during the SEL lessons, students will gradually change their attitude toward English, since students will acknowledge that English is an interesting tool for communication. Students' interviewee also consider that these two lessons are more interesting than usual English courses in school (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Therefore, implementing SEL into lessons by arranging with picture book and group work or creative projects can increase students' learning motivation in the classes. However, from the results, there are 71 percent of students who think that English cannot stimulate their interests to learn English after these 2 lessons.



Teacher C mentions that students need more time to open their hearts to share their emotions with other people, and teacher A also mentions that students require the time to accept the SEL pedagogy (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Therefore, two SEL lessons are not enough for students to adapt and learn SEL skills. SEL should be a long-term integration with junior high school English curriculum. In the other way, it will be very essential to briefly introduce the syllabus for students in the beginning of the classes (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). In conclusion, SEL lesson plan design will be effectively combined with picture books and creative projects, or group works and should be a long-term integration with junior high school English curriculum.

### **Research Question 2**

There are four issues for Taiwanese teachers to notice. First, after Teacher C introduces her lesson plan design, the observation from the Teacher C's interview is that designing the SEL lesson plans effectively and logically should follow each phase of SEL. It can assist students to reflect from the lessons, to think deeply about their emotions, values, and thoughts, and finally to demonstrate empathy to others (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Second, Teacher B and C respond in pre-actional phase that teachers do not help students discover their own desires and wishes to set goals but reply more on exams to motivate students to study English. In this case, students tend to have lower motivation to learn English. Therefore, it is not effective to arrange examinations into the SEL lesson plan (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Third, the statistic demonstrates that the students' satisfaction with the fluency of the teaching process in lesson one is 76 percent of students who are satisfied with the fluency of the first lesson and 24 percent of students who remain neutral. In lesson two, there are 67 percent of students who are satisfied with the fluency of the teaching process and 33 percent of students who remain neutral. It demonstrates that the teaching process in

the first lesson is more fluent than the second lesson. Teacher A mentions that the first lesson plan added comprehension check can strengthen students' understanding of the goal of picture books, so they are able to follow the lessons easily (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Fourth, according to Teacher B's interview, teachers will cooperate with differentiated and scaffolding instructions, since based on students' English level, they have the freedom to select the type of tasks to complete. Then, in the post-actional phase, Teacher B mentions that most students can finish their goal. However, if students could not finish the tasks, Teacher B replies that some intermediated students will ask the teacher for help, and the teacher will encourage and support them to finish it.

## **Discussion**

### **Research Question 1**

Research question one is to discover how to enhance students' English learning motivation by SEL lesson plan. Then, the results based on the finding demonstrate that SEL arranging with picture books and creative projects, or group works can enhance students' motivation, and it should be a long-term integration with SEL and English curriculum. In these two lesson plans, the characters in picture books can drive the students' motivation to the classes, and students can reflect their behaviors from the characters' behaviors or dialogs to think whether their decisions cause trouble for other people (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). This reflection can also train their SEL competence of Responsible Decision Making. From Teacher B's interview, the characters in the picture books are able to inspire students to reflect on themselves, and students can achieve the SEL benefits of having positive social behavior which can assist students to build a healthy relationship with others (Options for Youth, n.d.). Then, creative projects or group works can make students have a

deeper reflection of the purposes in the picture books and exhibit more self-motivation to accomplish their own tasks (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Referring to Teacher B' and Teacher C's lesson plans design, each lesson will be arranged with one to two creative projects or group works for students to accomplish. Since students can be invited in designing their own schedules or choosing which activities to engage in, they will have more motivation to accomplish it (Dörnyei, p.51). Then, through integrating SEL with creative projects and group works, it can train students' SEL competence of Relationship Skills, and students would develop self-discipline and self-motivation (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). In addition, it is important for teacher to provide authentic feedbacks toward students' reflection (Example of Social and Emotional Learning, 2017, p.3). The final condition is through long-term integration of SEL with the English curriculum, which is able to enhance students' motivation. Then, according to the study of Examples of SEL in Middle School Social Studies Instruction (2017), it mentions that Teacher need to establish a friendly learning environment as well as class roles and responsibilities that emphasizes the students' strengths, weaknesses, and their group goals in this duration (p.3). Therefore, students will be more willing to open their hearts and to engage in the classes.

### **Research Question 2**

According to the Research question 2, the issue that teachers should notice is that SEL integration with junior high school English curriculum should follow the 5 competences, since it can assist students to establish the SEL abilities stably and sustainably. When teachers prepare the lesson plans about these 5 competences, there are four conditions that Taiwanese teachers should also pay attention to when teachers start to design each lesson plan. The first one is the importance of warm-up game,

since it can assist students to concentrate on classes. Pentón Herrera's (2020) study demonstrates that through Mindfulness skill, students can focus on what they should need to do in the moment and release some unnecessary thoughts in their mind (p.9). In these two lessons, there are some questions preparing for students to pay attention to the class and release the distracted thoughts. The reflection from the class is that Mindfulness is a useful method for students to calm down their mind before the SEL class begins, and obviously, they are not easily influenced during the class (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). The second one is the importance of adding comprehension check. In accord with the results of the questionnaire, students consider that the first lecture is more fluent than the second lecture, since comprehension check can assist students to easily catch up the teacher's teaching. In addition, it not only serve as the scaffolding that can reinforce students' learning but also assist teachers to keep track of students' newest learning situations (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). Third one is the importance of differentiate and scaffolding instructions. Creative projects or group works are designed as part of the assessment, which can create more opportunities for students to choose their own topics, so it can effectively engage students in the lessons. (Field Notes, March-May, 2022). The fourth one is reduction in examination in SEL lessons. According to Teacher B' and Teacher C's interview, it is unnecessary to add the examination into the lesson plan, since SEL emphasizes students' holistic development, instead of focusing on their academic performance (Field Notes, March-May, 2022).

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, the result findings of this project may could contribute to prove that the potential of applying SEL in junior English curriculum can let students be more willing to learn English, but it doesn't guarantee that they will always feel the

same way. However, before the students' motivation improvement, teachers should notice that SEL courses should fulfill three conditions which are the efficient combination with picture book, creative project, and group work, long-term integration with English curriculum, and the lesson plan design following the order of 5 SEL competences. Due to time limitation, this is a small-scale AR project, and the results may not be generalized to other contexts. This project is not a long-term project, so it is hard to ensure their learning motivation can always be maintained. However, even though their learning motivation may not always exist, it is still important that they have basic knowledge about SEL. Therefore, they may gradually try to observe their own emotions and find their own values and interests. Through these courses, they can take their first step to explore themselves more and try to establish good and healthy relationships with people. In addition, this project might inspire some teachers in Taiwan who are interested in SEL and willing to integrate SEL into their curriculums.

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### **Writing Journal**

In fact, I think that during this process, I'm pretty lucky because I haven't spent much time on searching for the research topic. I also appreciate that Professor Sherri gives me a lot of supports, so I can do what I want to do. During this time, I find that it is not easy to be a researcher. Especially, we need to use the less time to accomplish research. For me, the difficulty is that I also need to design the lesson plans and to teach in the real classroom in person. Therefore, I need more time to prepare for this process. Fortunately, I met a friend in last semester, and he is very willing to let me teach in his class. Therefore, I can accomplish this research.

However, in my plan, I was planning to have three courses to be taught, but the pandemic couldn't let me finish it. Therefore, it seriously affected me to collect my data. Then, I also found that my questionnaire isn't designed good enough to provide the useful information for me. Thus, it also severely influenced me to refer the data. Fortunately, I have interviews with three teachers, and their teaching experiences are really helpful for me to complete my research.

Next time, I have few things which should be noticed. First, the questionnaire should be designed it better, and I need to think deeply about every questions. Second, the bad habit of academic procrastination should be broken. Third, I need to keep training my problem- solving ability because there were too many urgent things for me to face it at this time. Then, I don't think that I solved the problems well this time. Fourth, the passion to this topic should be kept in my mind. Then, I expect that I can have a better research result in the future.

This experience lets me think that in the future, I do want to explore and develop more about this topic because I think that SEL is very essential and useful for students nowadays. Then, I hope that I can do it better if I have the opportunity to do this research again.

