

INTEGRATING SEL, EI, AND AFFECTIVE FILTER THEORY: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR EMOTIONALLY SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional well-being are critical yet often overlooked components in second language acquisition. This paper explores how integrating EI into English Language Teaching (ELT), supported by digital tools and the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, can enhance language learning outcomes. Drawing on Daniel Goleman's theory of EI, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, and the CASEL SEL framework, the study examines the impact of emotional factors such as anxiety, cultural stress, and language shame on learners' engagement and progress. Special attention is given to adolescent and adult learners who frequently experience motivational burnout and linguistic self-consciousness. The paper proposes practical, technology enhanced strategies including digital storytelling, mindfulness applications, and peer collaboration platforms to support learners' emotional and linguistic development. Rather than focusing solely on cognitive or performance metrics, this work advocates for emotionally sustainable ELT practices that nurture well-being alongside language proficiency. In doing so, it responds to the growing need for holistic, human-centered approaches in increasingly digital and multicultural learning environments.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Mental Well-being, ELT, SEL, sustainable Learning, affective filter hypothesis.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, English Language Teaching (ELT) has focused on the linguistic competence that is made up of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency through cognitive driven models of instruction. While cognitive based instructional models can certainly support linguistic skill development for students, they can also overlook predecessors emotionally and psychologically. Along with cognitive components, second language acquisition is emotional. When students acquire a second language, they bring their prior experiences, emotional insecurity, and psychological place with them. These deep emotional matters can significantly affect how learners engage in, interact with, and retain a new language. This can be especially true with adolescent and adult learners who encounter added pressure associated with identity, academic achievement and cultural adaptation.

Although there has been a furthered focus on learner centered pedagogy, emotional intelligence (EI), and mental well-being, ELT contexts are still not adequately supporting in

this area. Emotional discomfort is frequently taken for lack of interest or lack of ability, and many classrooms become avenues that foster anxiety, isolation or demotivation. These states are problems that directly counter the emotional safety required for language acquisition. In a globalized, digitally connected world of rapid change, 21st-century learners need support that is emotional, not just linguistically. As educators advocate for technology in the school context, teachers are now privy to digital tools that are freely available, such as: mindfulness apps, journaling apps, peer-sharing forums, and storytelling tools to help support learners' emotional trajectories.

This paper suggests a theoretically and technology-informed framework for emotionally sustainable English language teaching, drawing on Goleman's concept of Emotional Intelligence, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and the CASEL SEL model. The paper suggests ways of creating an emotionally responsive classroom to help support a language learner's participation in a sustainable, holistic conceptualization of education.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a conceptual methodology in developing a theoretical framework for emotionally sustainable English Language Teaching (ELT). It does not use empirical research; instead, it reviews and synthesizes prior works from the realms of emotional intelligence (Goleman), second language acquisition (Krashen), and, social-emotional learning (CASEL).

The aim of this paper and the proposed theoretical framework is to offer an exploratory investigation into how emotional factors, such as anxiety, motivation, and, cultural stress interact within specific emotional learning contexts to affect learners' language learning success, particularly among adolescent and adult learners. The theoretical frameworks were reviewed and integrated to produce a model that treats emotional well-being, and linguistic development, as co-dependent, or previously identified as a 'scaffold.'

There are other examples of available digital tools that were discovered that either relate pedagogically to the proposed model of emotional support strategies. Mindfulness apps, frameworks for reflective journaling, and a better understanding of whether peer causal networks using current technologies are helpful in enhancing pedagogy are discussed in terms of their potential pedagogical uses rather than any 'actual' pedagogical works from experimentation or professional use.

This approach allows the study to offer a relatively clean theory-based contribution to ELT practice, with an emphasis on promoting emotional safety and resilience, and learner empowerment in both physical and virtual classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on three interdependent theoretical frameworks to form a comprehensive model of an emotionally sustainable English Language Teaching (ELT) program. The frameworks included in the model are Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) framework, Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, and the CASEL framework related to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). While each of these frameworks represents a distinct and focused interpretation of emotionality or emotion in learning, they are interdependent and offer a complementary perspective on how emotions influence learning. Goleman is interested in the individual's emotional competencies; Krashen is interested in understanding the emotional barriers of language acquisition; and CASEL is interested in the development of social-emotional learning skills in educational contexts. Together these frameworks are providing an integrative framework to understand,

and improve learners' emotional capacity for English Language Learning, particularly for teenage or adult learners who are navigating and working with affect.

1. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: GOLEMAN, MAYER & SALOVEY

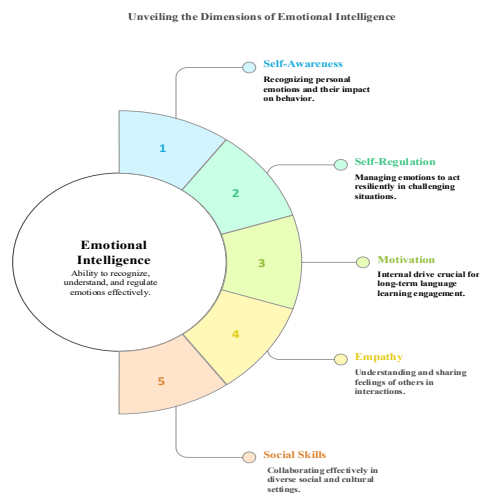


Figure 1: Components of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman's Model)

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and use emotions in a constructive way across contexts. The term was first used by Mayer and Salovey (1990), who were focused on emotional reasoning as a contributor to adaptive functioning. The construct was popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995) in education and management on the basis of five elements of emotional intelligence: (1) self-awareness (2) self-regulation (3) motivation (4) empathy, and (5) social skills.

In the context of ELT, each of these types of competence is necessary for the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. For example, self-awareness allows students to recognize anxious feelings or emotional triggers that may come from speaking assignments, whereas self-regulation allows them to act with resilience instead of simply avoiding the situation. Motivation, as an internal and somehow extrinsic drive, is crucial because language learning has a very long arc of engagement with no immediate rewards. Empathy, and social skills come together to collaboratively work in group tasks in multicultural classrooms, facilitating pragmatic awareness in communication.

Goleman (2006) argues that these competencies can be taught in explicit ways, guided by pedagogical intentions, lesson planning and the teaching profession itself, that can develop emotional intelligence so as to be able to work with the components in emotionally intelligent learning spaces. Students learning in emotionally responsive ELT environments begin to recognize teachers modelling and explicit teacher instructions for students to engage emotionally and socially with the tasks after they engage through their intellectual capability.

2. KRASHEN'S AFFECTIVE FILTER HYPOTHESIS

Affective Filter in Language Acquisition

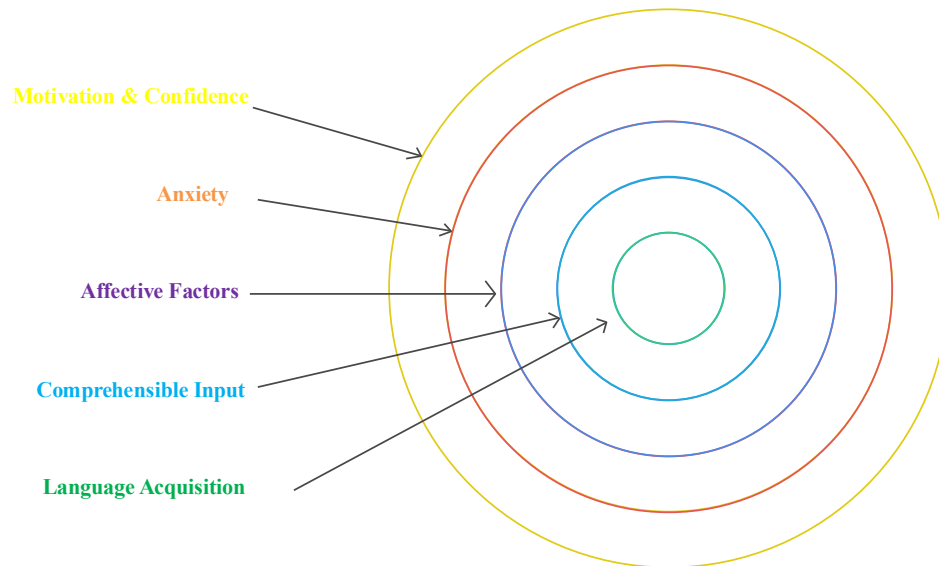


Figure 2: Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis falls within his larger Monitor Model of second language acquisition. This hypothesis emphasizes that affective factors, specifically motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety directly influence the reception of comprehensible input. Krashen (1982) argues that when learners experience high anxiety or fear, the "affective filter" inhibits their ability to internalize the input they receive. Conversely, low anxiety environments that are characterized by encouragement, security, and emotional support facilitate more input to get through to the learner and to be acquired.

Research supports Krashen's claims about affective filters. For example, Young (1991) identified classroom anxiety as a major contributor to decreased oral performance. Horwitz et al. (1986) contributed to the research when they developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) that the research and measurement of emotional state may impact their language learning. What Krashen emphasizes in this theory is the importance of diminishing these emotional threats in the language classroom through empathetic teachers, collaborative structures for student learning, and supportive feedback processes.

What they all can offer in practice is collaboration or integration of more EI-based strategies in the classroom that purposely decrease the affective filter to allow learners to fully engage with an input-based intervention.

3. CASEL'S SEL COMPETENCIES

CASEL Framework for Social and Emotional Learning

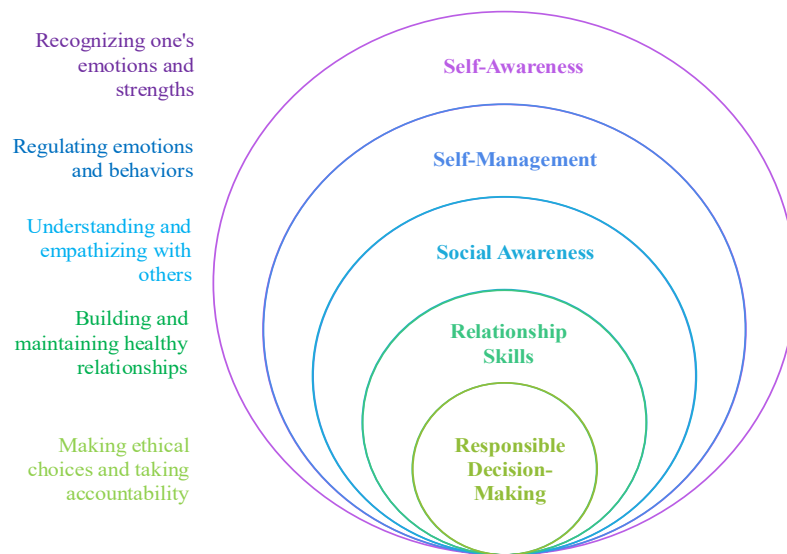


Figure 3: CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework

The CASEL framework (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003) provides five interrelated competencies for SEL: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship skills, and (5) responsible decision-making. These competencies, in the sense of human skill and capacity development, are designed to contribute to preparing students for academic success, ethical engagement as thoughtful professionals, and responsible citizenship on both local and global levels within democratic societies. SEL has been increasingly tied to positive educational outcomes, including academic achievement, reduced emotional distress, and greater acts of prosocial behaviour (Durlak et al., 2011).

In language learning, all the SEL competencies are relevant. Self-awareness and self-management relate to emotional regulation when performing oral tasks or assessments. Depending on the learning context, social awareness and relationship skills can contribute to intended collaborations with fellow students in a multilingual environment, or simply foster respect for speakers with diverse languages and dialects. Responsible decision-making contributes to the learning of social language of English Language Learners with respect, sensitivity to context, and cultural humility.

CASEL further notes how SEL is ecological and must reflect development across personal, interpersonal, and collective levels (and context). Specifically, SEL must be integrated at the level of individual action (e.g. classroom or tutor practice), school-level initiatives, and collaboration with community-based organizations toward systemic change. In terms of ELT, this means we will need to revise education curricula to integrate emotional vocabulary, empathy-centered learning activities, and peer-social mentoring with respect to language learning, and digital tools that actively support mental health.

The intersection of these three models presents a strong foundation for envisioning an emotionally sustainable English Language Teaching (ELT) setting. Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory provides emotional competencies at the individual level; Krashen's hypothesis emphasizes the consequence of emotions with respect to cognitive processing,

and CASEL provides a response model for establishing and maintaining emotional learning at the level of ecosystem.

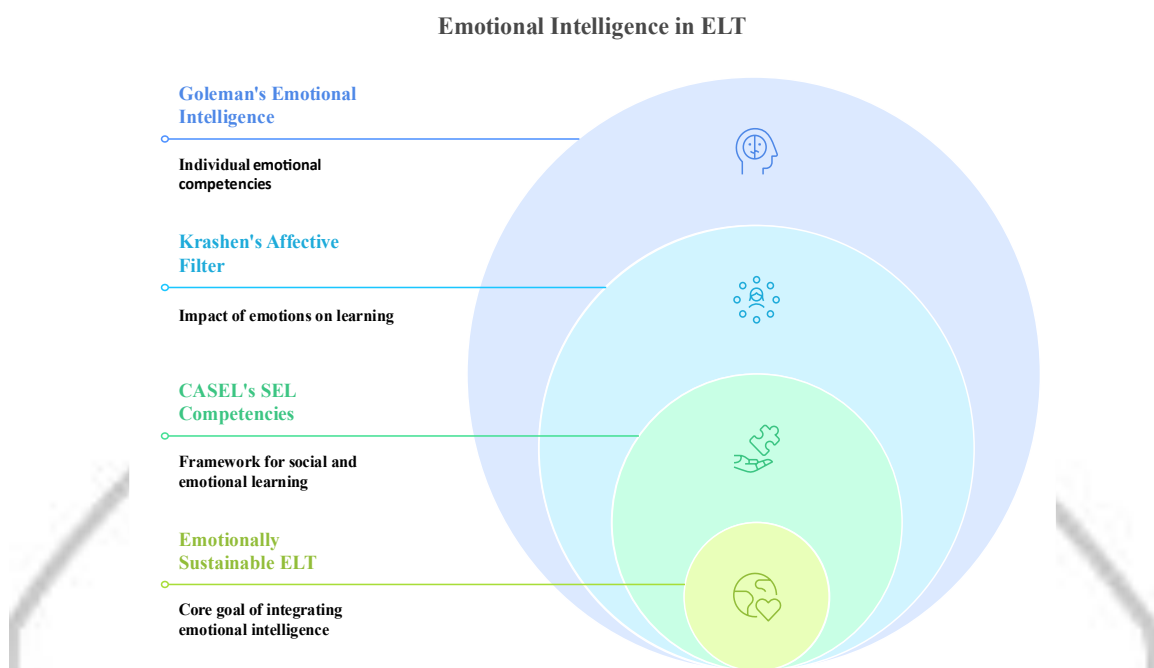


Figure 4: Emotional Intelligence in ELT

This layered diagram illustrates the integration of Goleman's emotional competencies, Krashen's affective filter theory, and CASEL's SEL framework, culminating in the core goal of emotionally sustainable English language teaching.

When considered together, they provide evidence for:

- Recognizing and honoring learners' emotional experiences.
- Minimizing anxiety through the practice of emotionally safe pedagogies.
- Creating opportunities for collaboration and fostering empathy in multicultural classrooms.
- Increased motivation through emotionally engaging materials and methods.
- Practices and digital tools that align with social and emotional learning (SEL) to engage learners in reflection, mindfulness, and peer connection.

The theoretical convergence of EI, the affective filter, and SEL, provides valuable insights into the role emotional processing plays in language learning while also providing practical directions towards redesigning ELT in emotionally intelligent and sustainable ways.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Emotional Intelligence (EI), as defined by Daniel Goleman (1995), is the capacity to recognize, manage and express emotions in a constructive way, in relation to oneself and others. As it relates to English language, EI is important in terms of how English learners engage with learning the language, how they manage emotional barriers, and how they engage with one another in the language class. For adolescent and adult English language learners (ELLs), EI is not just desirable as a personal characteristic, but rather a valuable pedagogical tool that can promote engagement, confidence, and academic resilience in the language classroom.

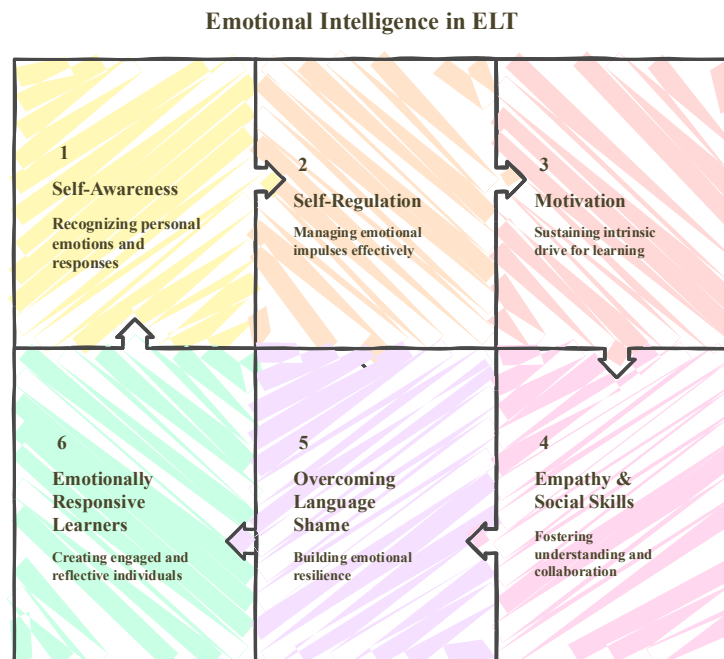


Figure 5: Emotional Intelligence Components for ELT

This puzzle-style diagram maps six interrelated elements—adapted from Goleman’s emotional intelligence framework—highlighting key emotional skills and outcomes that support language learners in building motivation, resilience, and collaborative engagement in ELT contexts.

Another vital aspect to include is motivation and, in particular, intrinsic motivation, which keeps learners engaged during the long and often winding road to acquiring a new language. Emotionally intelligent learners will be able to find internal significance to their progress and endure the various failures that will happen along the way. They will set boundaries for themselves with realistic expectations; they will adjust and adapt to failures that they will experience and not need the validation of others such as marks or praise.

EI also refers to empathy and other social skills that are important in completing collaborative language tasks. Empathy fosters understanding and respect for whom we are learning with in our heterogeneous (culture diversity) classrooms. Empathy also allows for psychological safety, developing a sense of ownership that allows learners to participate in classrooms more willingly. Emotional intelligence and social skills advance itself to how learners interact with each other, including constructive feedback, initiation of conversations with peers, and how they relate to each other to build community as they are establishing a space that leads to both academic and emotional success.

There are also many learners who encounter language shame, fear of judgment, or emotional exhaustion, especially if they have allergic reactions to previous academic failure or internalized notions of inferiority. These types of emotions can present as silence, avoidance, or perfectionism, and can significantly undermine development or progress if not corrected. EI fosters learner awareness of negative self-concept and resilience to the emotional difficulties they encounter. Making use of reflective exercises such as journaling, reflective storytelling, or other development exercises which reward effort, rather than perfection, can facilitate a learner’s ability to positively rethink their identity.

Most importantly, the goal of EI, as part of the ELT practice, is to create emotionally attuned learners who will be more engaged, reflective, and within a better position to handle the emotional demands of learning a language. EI can be applied through lessons or activities, such as an emotional check-in, or an empathy building task, and through providing safe space for students to explore their learning in an ELT classroom that is as much about emotional development as it is linguistic development. This task could be even more rewarding for educators working with adolescents or adults experiencing tensions between complicated emotional and academic demands."

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN THE ELT CONTEXT

Mental health has become an ever more important yet underreported aspect of English Language Teaching (ELT). Due to a cognitive impairment or simply, lack of will for academic underperformance is often misinterpreted. There are many English language learners (ELLs), especially adolescents who clearly have a language or cognitive disability; however, many lack of will is a result of, being mentally overloaded, feeling psychological isolation and psychological fatigue. These mental health issues can either be situational or chronic, and can greatly interfere with language learning and engagement in the classroom.

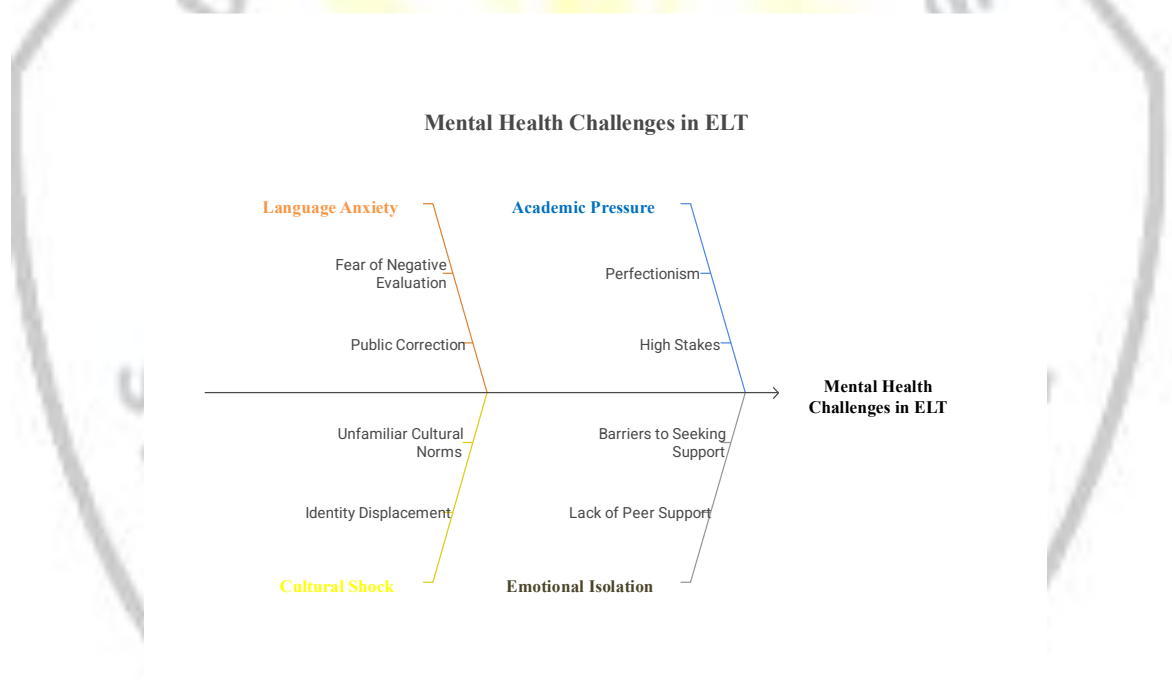


Figure 6: Mental Health Challenges in ELT

This fishbone diagram categorizes key emotional and psychological challenges faced by language learners, including anxiety, cultural shock, academic pressure, and emotional isolation as underlying causes affecting mental well-being in English Language Teaching environments.

Language anxiety is one of the most prevalent problems, a form of situational anxiety, which is due to being evaluated in the target language. Horwitz et al (1986) distinguish language anxiety from language-use anxiety and labelled the anxieties found in foreign language students as cognitive (e.g., fast heart rate, heavy breathing), social (e.g., fear of negative assessment) and performance anxiety (e.g., positive anxiety). Language anxiety is acute

during presentations and group work; and many learners reported feeling more anxious in contexts whereby fluency was not primary and students were publicly corrected in front of peers. Language anxiety often leads to withdrawal, silence (e.g., students not speaking) or students can feel helpless.

A further major issue for learners is cultural shock and identity displacement. Learners constantly have to wade through a fresh language landscape as well as a cultural landscape while simply trying to exist. Newcomers (i.e., immigrants, refugees and international students) can feel psychologically disoriented which can negatively impact participation and critical expression. Academic stress and perfectionism are also considerable sources of stress for many students, especially those who have high stakes that rely on their language proficiency (e.g., visa requirements, employment possibilities). Learners may be constantly compelled to be perfect (not make mistakes) and this can promote a level of situational stress during language learning that can lead to fear of making mistakes, period of not wanting to use the language, and ultimately burnout or academic disengagement. When classrooms focus on assessment instead of exploration within the curriculum, learners may shift away from intrinsic motivation and their emotional connection to the language learning experience.

Emotional isolation, in particular, in large and virtual ELT contexts. Many learners that lack a sense of belonging to a form of social engagement within a learning community report feelings of loneliness and emotional dislocation. This is exceptionally harmful for learners who are neurodiverse and/or have experienced trauma, and learners who are adults often feel physically and emotionally distanced from learning communities in immense roles just to balance family, work, and learning, converting the language learning experience into a transactional process of learning as opposed to a transformative experience.

Lastly, barriers to help-seeking behaviours, including social stigma, cultural taboos, and the lack of access to mental health services leave many learners to cope with their mental health issues in silence. Even where, there is access to health services, they are often not culturally or linguistically appropriate. It is rare to see well-being addressed as a legitimate issue in learning program curriculum design, and as the psychological impacts on well-being are seldom addressed. Without explicit recognition of the problems of stress and emotional well-being by institutions, and any proactive mental health strategies from educators, learners face potential long-term disengagement from academic career paths, emotional exhaustion, and unrealized academic potential.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

To build emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional well-being in English Language Teaching (ELT) beyond theory, educators need to adopt tangible and learner-centred approaches. These approaches should reduce affective barriers, increase resilience, and create an emotionally supportive learning space, in both physical and digital forms. Building on the work of Goleman (1995), Krashen (1982), and the CASEL SEL competencies, this section provides a variety of practical strategies and tools for educators in ELT with a focus on adolescent and adult learners.

1. Emotion-based Language Tasks

- **Feelings Vocabulary Activities:** Before the beginning of class, spend a few minutes engaging in an emotional check-in with a “feelings wheel” or mood cards. The learners choose a feeling and explain how they feel in English, using words like

"anxious," "hopeful," "overwhelmed," or "motivated." This normalizes emotional language and develops self-awareness.

- **Narrative Writing and Storytelling:** Ask students to write a short narrative or a fictional story that is centered around an emotional theme like courage, failure, empathy, or belonging. Instructors can encourage the use of reflective sentence structures (e.g., "I felt.... because...") and descriptive emotional language.

These tasks strengthen self-expression, empathy, and social awareness while simultaneously building fluency and vocabulary.

2. Integration of Digital Tools for Emotional Support

The current digital landscape provides countless options for free and low-cost tools for adult ELT learners, which can enhance their emotional awareness, mindfulness and social connection. These tools are especially helpful for supporting adult learners in online and hybrid spaces.

- **Mindfulness and Self-Regulation Apps:**
 - Headspace and Calm provide guided meditations for students before or after language assessment in order to lessen anxiety.
 - Smiling Mind includes age-appropriate emotional regulation practices for younger adult learners.
- **Digital Journaling Platforms:**
 - Daylio and Reflectly allow students to track their mood privately, as well as reflect on their emotional learning process. Teachers may wish to encourage optional weekly reflection in English, related to what has been taught in class.
- **Gamified Emotional Learning:**
 - The Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence has created the Mood Meter application to teach students to label and track their emotions over time.

By integrating these tools as optional or embedded parts of the curriculum, educators provide safe, tech-supported spaces for emotional exploration and growth.

3. Mindful and Reflective Teaching Practices

The emotional environment of the classroom is often influenced by the way the teacher approaches their teaching. Teachers that model emotional regulation, have empathy, and build trust create spaces for their learners to feel psychologically safe in and as a result maximize learning.

- **Emotion Check-Ins:** Start your classes with quick, low-stakes sharing rounds like: "What is one thing that challenged you before you got to class today?" or "What emotion are you bringing to the room today?"
- **Gratitude Journal:** Ask your students to write brief week-long gratitude/journal entries in English. Practicing gratitude, no matter how small of a gesture, can foster emotional resilience and positive mindset.
- **Mindfulness Pause:** Anyplace you have a transition or tension in the classroom, you can stop the lesson to have the learner's ground or breathe for a minute. This serves two purposes - one as a mindfulness moment to reduce cognitive overload to engage in learning and two, to prepare the learners for the next learning experience.

- **Process-Based Feedback:** Centre feedback on effort, progress, and self-awareness not perfection. Statements like “I noticed how you were able to remain calm when you presented this” can ground EI directly into the learning experience.

4. Social Learning and Peer Collaboration

Collaborative learning is essential for students to develop social skills and emotional competence. Culturally embedded classrooms emphasizing EI promote academic interaction and interpersonal understanding.

- **Peer Journaling or Buddy Systems:** Give students time each week to check in with their peers, discussing their academic intentions and emotions in English.
- **Empathy Mapping Tasks:** Use texts or listening activities with powerful emotional impact. After reading, have students map out a character's emotions, and question what emotional strategies the character used.

5. Creating Emotionally Supportive Class Cultures

An emotionally sustainable ELT environment is not built on isolated activities but on a consistent culture of care, empathy, and trust.

- **Co-created Class Agreements:** Include learners in the process of creating and agreeing upon values or emotional norms (e.g. "Making mistakes is part of learning," "We listen with respect," "We don't laugh at anyone's accent").
- **Emotionally Inclusive Assessments:** Include components to assessments or self-assessments that allow students to consider their emotional experience during the task (e.g., "How confident did you feel delivering your presentation today?").
- **Safe Spaces for Sharing:** Identify parts of the class (or spaces in the forum) for learners to share challenges, strategies, or encouragement with their peers

CONCLUSION

This paper argues for a shift in English Language Teaching (ELT) away from context-free cognitive and structural approaches, to one that evolves into Emotional Intelligence (EI), embraces Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and incorporates affective pedagogy in some form. There is a several challenges that adolescent and adult learners face when holding bad feelings that could be replaced with pain, discomfort, or stressors such as anxiety, cultural dislocation, and/or feelings of burnout. As such, this paper explores a conceptual framework based on Daniel Goleman's EI model, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, and CASEL's SEL competency model.

Instead of presenting an empirically-tested intervention, the goal is to suggest a theoretical model for emotionally sustainable ELT that curriculum developers and teachers can employ to develop holistic, learner-centred environments. Using digital tools such as mindfulness apps, digital diaries, technology for collaborative tracking, etc. may be seen as potentially accomplishing these tasks for emotional well-being, regardless of the room or nexus of virtual or hybrid classrooms.

Ultimately, this study calls for an entire shift in paradigm: from seeing language learning as a mechanical process to seeing language learning as an embodied human process grounded in empathy, resilience, and safe emotionality. Emotional engagement that is sustainable in ELT doesn't always mean that change is required, but thoughtful, intentional practices that allow for the emotional realities of learners to be acknowledged. Future research may

include how this framework is operationalized in classrooms, and how tools may play a role in impacting learners' emotional engagement and potential motivation.

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