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International students' perspectives on social-emotional competences in the context of an intervention study

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In recent years, internationalisation and globalisation have significantly influenced the movement of people, information, policies, and knowledge, driving the expansion of international higher education. This study focuses on international students enrolled in English-medium international programmes in Finland, which are inherently multicultural and bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds. While this diversity enriches the learning environment, it also presents emotional and interpersonal challenges in adapting to new systems and contexts and navigating cultural differences.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been shown to enhance collaboration and learning effectiveness by improving academic and career success, fostering positive attitudes and behaviours, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and promoting well-being. This research aims to explore students' thinking on social-emotional competences within the context of a short-term SEL intervention during the introductory course of an international master's degree.

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the qualitative responses of nine participants across three surveys, conducted at different stages of the intervention, with the aim of providing insights into the intervention's outcomes. The results of this study illustrate that students found cultural differences influencing their communication and self-regulation, highlighting the importance of considering these factors when designing SEL programmes in an international setting. The intervention appeared to foster students' awareness and reflection on social-emotional competencies. Participants particularly showed awareness in communication-related aspects and were able to reflect on multiple challenges and contextual factors connected to all three competences. Moreover, participants noted that the reflection diary as a beneficial tool for developing emotional awareness together with verbal discussion of their emotions. In conclusion, the researcher argues that the implementation of SEL programmes should extend beyond the school level to higher education institutions, especially in international programmes where students face unique challenges in adapting to new systems and contexts and navigating cultural differences.

Key words: social emotional learning, emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, self-regulation, international students, university, postsecondary education, multicultural education, intervention

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the processes of internationalisation and globalisation, which have influenced the flow of people, information, policies, and knowledge, have led to the growth of international higher education (Caruso & de Wit, 2015; Gu et al., 2010). In particular, Finland has experienced increased immigration and attracted more students following its accession to the European Union, leading to a tripling in the number of international students pursuing degrees in the country between 2000 and 2016 (Mathies & Karhunen, 2021). However, multiple challenges, such as a limited number of courses available in English or a lack of academic support, have been identified in the Finnish context (Calikoglu, 2018; Pitkänen et al., 2013).

The current study focused specifically on international students enrolled in international programmes with English as the medium of instruction. These programmes, by their very nature, are characterised by their multicultural environment, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. As learning cannot be detached from cultural context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, as cited in Hecht & Shin, 2016), it's important to recognise that culture encompasses a broad perspective involving a set of thoughts, patterns, and behaviours of individuals, rather than being limited to race or ethnicity (Hecht & Shin, 2016). Despite the enriching environment, these differences in thoughts, patterns and behaviours can pose challenges and affect learning. Students coming from different cultures face various challenges, including new academic requirements and expectations, adapting to new cultural norms, interpersonal understanding, and difficulties cooperating with fellow classmates (Pitkänen et al., 2013; Popov et al., 2012). To enhance collaboration and learning effectiveness, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), the process of learning social-emotional skills in the educational setting, proves beneficial (Hoffman, 2009; Weissberg et al., 2016). The benefits of SEL programmes include improvements in the academic or future career success, positive attitudes and behaviours, interpersonal relationships, and well-being (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018).

Furthermore, social-emotional competences play a crucial role in navigating aforementioned challenges encountered in university contexts and future careers (Gilar-Corbí et al., 2018). Additionally, the initial period of adaptation presents an opportune time to incorporate social-emotional content into introductory learning seminars (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013). International students, in particular, face new emotional challenges associated with adaptation and significant

life changes, which can impact their academic experiences (Gu et al., 2010). Gilar-Corbí and colleagues (2018) propose that universities provide an optimal environment for the development of these competences by integrating them into daily learning. This approach further enhances learning through the construction of knowledge by incorporating new information to students' relevant experiences (Bada & Olusegun, 2015).

Moreover, international students are exposed to diverse educational systems that may prioritise social-emotional competences to varying degrees at the school level. Therefore, the development of these competences should not be expected to conclude upon reaching the postsecondary level, even though the implementation of SEL programmes in higher education often lacks a structured approach (Conley, 2016). It is essential to recognise that emotions develop and mature with age (Camras, 2022), and adults can continue to benefit from further development of social-emotional competences at the university level.

The current research aims to explore students' thinking and reflection within the context of a short-term SEL intervention during the introductory course of an international master's degree programme. The study attempts to contribute to the field by integrating the international context with the implementation of SEL in higher education and to inform future SEL programmes. To analyse the effects of the intervention, multiple data sets were collected to observe students' thinking and reflections throughout the process. The main research question guiding the analysis is follows:

How do students think and reflect on their social-emotional competences (specifically emotional awareness, communication, and self-regulation) throughout a short-term intervention?

This study addresses three social and emotional competences: emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, and self-regulation. These competences are outlined in the next section, entitled *Theoretical background* along with Social-Emotional Learning and relevant theories. The subsequent section, *Methodology and Intervention design*, provides a detailed description of the research design process, which is followed by the *Data Analysis* section. The two final sections, *Findings* and *Conclusion*, present the results, discussion of them and limitations of the study.

2 Theoretical background

2.1. Social-Emotional Learning

One of the earliest definitions of Social-Emotional Learning, also known as SEL, states that it is the process through which people develop their social and emotional competence (Elias et al., 1997). The word learning is purposefully added to the concept of social-emotional skills to highlight the idea of improvement of the competences over time usually done in the school context (Weissberg et al., 2016). Since then, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which brings together educators, researchers, and child advocates, has been formed to integrate evidence-based SEL into schooling in the US context (Weissberg et al., 2016). The goals of the organisation include developing the science of SEL, expanding the use of effective SEL practices, and improving US policies to facilitate the implementation of SEL (Weissberg et al., 2016).

Based on the multidisciplinary collaboration and research, CASEL presented a comprehensive framework for SEL that identifies five core competences: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Weissberg et al., 2016). The framework encompasses that the coordinated systemic efforts of SEL implementation through classroom, school, family, and community provides comprehensive results (Hoffman, 2009; Weissberg et al., 2016). SEL is typically implemented through programmes that employ comprehensive educational approaches to develop social-emotional skills through explicit instruction and student-centred learning (Weissberg et al., 2016). Meta-analyses of the outcomes of SEL programmes on social-emotional skills show positive short-term effects for students, including improved social-emotional skills, positive attitudes and better social behaviour (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018). In addition, follow-up studies conducted at least six months after SEL programmes suggest that these programmes have lasting, albeit reduced, benefits, particularly for academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, despite the advantages these programmes offer, their implementation in higher education usually lacks a structured approach and examples of implementation (Conley, 2016; Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013). Since Conley's (2016) review of SEL and similar programmes implemented in higher education contexts, numerous researchers have attempted to integrate

SEL into existing higher education curricula, with positive results in terms of improved social-emotional skills and student learning outcomes (e.g. Elmi, 2020; Mäkinen et al., 2021; Zach & Rosenblum, 2021). However, further research is needed to develop programmes that observe long-term effects through follow-up studies and to implement SEL systematically and comprehensively in higher education. (Conley, 2016; Kotsou et al., 2019).

2.1.1. Social dimension

As the name suggests, Social-Emotional Learning comprises two main dimensions: social and emotional. The following sections will elaborate on these dimensions, beginning with the social aspect. Several terms are associated with the social dimension, including social skills, social competence, and closely related interpersonal skills. The two most frequently used terms, social skills and social competence, are often used interchangeably. Social skills can be conceptualised from both macro and micro perspectives. From a micro perspective, social skills encompass specific, detailed behaviours, for example, maintaining appropriate eye contact or using intonation (Beck & Forehand, 1984). On the other hand, the macro perspective includes broader, more complex skills like assertiveness or empathy (Beck & Forehand, 1984). This term is often used synonymously with interpersonal skills, which are essential for building and maintaining human relationships, with communication frequently considered a pivotal aspect of this process (Spizberg & Cupah, 2011).

In comparison to social or interpersonal skills, the concept of social competence can be considered as overarching one (Topping et al., 2000). Topping and colleagues (2000, p.32) define social competence as an “ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behavior to achieve social tasks and outcomes valued in the host context and culture”. Central to social competence is the enhancement of effective interpersonal relationships and social skills (Tolan et al., 2016), which confirms the overarching nature of the term. Social competence involves the understanding and interpretation of social cues, the analysis of one’s own and others’ behaviours, the formulation of social decisions into desired behaviour and the resolution of interpersonal problems (Topping et al., 2000).

It is frequently observed that social competence and emotional competence are closely related, with the two concepts often occurring together in interaction. The various models of social and

emotional competences do not differentiate between the two dimensions, in a manner similar to the SEL framework, which does not make this distinction and does not discuss them separately. Saarni (1999, as cited in Ciarrochi et al., 2003) proposed that social development cannot be separated from emotional development, as emotional competences are needed in the social contexts. Specifically, emotional awareness and emotion regulation have been identified as playing a role in the development of social competence (Denham et al., 2003).

2.1.2. Emotional dimension

To explore the second dimension of SEL, it is necessary to define *emotion* and distinguish it from similar terms. However, no single definition exists, as numerous theories attempt to explain what emotion is from the perspective of different fields. Therefore, the concept of emotion needs to be approached through an interdisciplinary lens (Scherer, 2005). Scherer (2005) defines emotion as a multi-component process which involves expression, bodily reactions, action tendencies, information processing and subjective feeling components. Similarly, the cognitive-developmental theory of emotional awareness defines emotion as an automatic change “in physiological, cognitive, and motivational states” in response to external or internal stimuli (Lane & Smith, 2021, p. 2). The latter definition emphasises that emotion is a response to stimuli.

Other terms are sometimes used interchangeably with the word emotion, such as affect or feeling. *Affect* is a multidisciplinary term debated across various fields, often used to describe the neurophysiological or psychological state induced by a situation’s impact on an individual (Duncan & Barrett, 2007). This aligns with the aforementioned definitions of emotion, although it emphasises the aspect of internal response to external stimuli. The choice of the word emotion over affect in this paper is guided by the frequency of use of one over the other in the field of education, particularly in the area of social-emotional learning research.

The word *feeling* is commonly used in educational research interchangeably with the word emotion. However, Scherer (2005) highlights in his approach that the word feeling is not a synonym for emotion, but rather one aspect of it associated with subjective experiences. As emotional awareness centres on understanding one’s own emotions, which involves conscious subjective perception of them, feelings can be seen as an important and equal component of

emotional awareness competence (DeMink-Carthew, 2020). Thus, in this thesis, emotions and feelings will be used side-by-side to provide further clarity for both researcher and participants. While the above description does not attempt to provide a precise definition of emotion, it does attempt to encompass the diverse and multifaceted nature of emotion.

From an evolutionary standpoint, various researchers proposed that emotions have evolved, as they are observed across animals and humans, and despite differences in expression, certain emotions are universal (Van Heijst et al., 2023). This idea leads to the debate over what constitutes basic or primary emotions, which are observed across different societies and are not affected by environmental variations. For instance, Ekman and Friesen (1971) defined six basic emotions by analysing facial expressions across various cultures: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust. On the contrary, Plutchik (1980) identified eight basic emotions – anger, disgust, sadness, surprise, fear, trust, joy, anticipation – and conceptualised them on a circle based on their similarities and differences. Although the list of basic emotions mainly uses single terms, each of these emotions represent a broader category, encompassing various nuanced emotions that fall under the main group (Levenson, 2011).

However, the concept of universal emotions is explored through the examination of cultural variations in emotional expression beyond facial changes. It is important to note that emotional expression is merely one component of emotion. Rather than being constrained to a specific set of actions associated with a particular emotion, emotional expression is a dynamic and flexible process. While basic emotions are presumed to be relatively consistent across diverse cultures, their expressive behaviour is believed to be influenced by the cultural setting (Cordaro et al., 2018). The studies also expanded their research to encompass a greater number of emotions than the six to eight basic ones previously considered, in order to support the dialect theory of emotion expression (Cordaro et al., 2018; Laukka & Elfenbein, 2021). This theory posits that cultural variability in emotion expression is associated with processes similar to those observed in linguistic dialects (Elfenbein, 2013).

The present study will examine three main competences within both dimensions: emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, and self-regulation. These will be aligned with the core competencies from the CASEL framework and expanded upon through specific theoretical perspectives. While the SEL Framework offers a universal vision focused on promoting

children's social, emotional, and academic development, the curriculum, content, and implementation strategies are guided by distinct theoretical choices (Brackett et al., 2016).

2.2. Emotional Awareness

Emotional awareness aligns with CASEL self-awareness, which is defined as “the abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior across contexts” (CASEL, 2020). While CASEL’s framework encompasses various constructs of self-awareness, the present research specifically targets emotional awareness due to it serving as a foundation for further skills, which will be elaborated further in Section 2.6.

In accordance with the cognitive-developmental theory proposed by Lane and Smith (2021), emotional awareness can be defined as a conscious cognitive process of attention and reflection on the automatic changes and reactions of the self. Emotional awareness not only encompasses the recognition of emotions but also entails the conscious processing of information and its incorporation into decision-making or behavioural changes. (Lane & Smith, 2021). Additionally, emotional awareness encompasses the capacity to perceive and differentiate others’ emotions based on contextual cues (Lane & Smith, 2021). Integrating these aspects, the core definition for the thesis is as follows:

Emotional awareness competence is an ability of an individual to consciously identify, describe and reflect on own emotions and feelings, alongside the understanding of emotions and feelings of others.

The cognitive-developmental theory of emotional awareness identifies five levels of the emotional awareness: somatic sensations, action tendencies, individual feelings, blends of feelings, blends of blends (Lane & Smith, 2021). The detailed description of each level can be seen in Table 1. Worth noting, each subsequent level adds to the previous ones rather than replacing them (Lane & Smith, 2021). Therefore, the skill of emotional awareness and its five levels aim to depict the complexity of emotions as a multi-component process (Lane & Smith, 2021).

Table 1. Levels of emotional awareness and examples

Level 1 – Somatic sensations: Individuals are able to describe emotional experiences through description of bodily sensations	I feel hot.
Level 2 – Action tendencies: Individuals are able to describe emotional experience through actions or action tendencies	I want to start a fight.
Level 3 – Individual feelings: Individuals are able to describe a specific feeling, usually one-dimensional	I feel angry.
Level 4 – Blends of feelings: Individuals are able to distinguish different and/or opposing feelings from each other and describe them	I feel angry yet sad.
Level 5 – Blends of blends: Individuals are able to understand the complexity of their own and others' emotions, they are able to imagine oneself in others' situations without the influence of their own emotions.	I feel angry yet sad, while another person would feel happy.

Note. Adapted from Lane and Smith (2021)

The development of emotional awareness is a process that involves individuals attending to their own emotions and reflecting on the meaning of their emotional experiences (Lane & Smith, 2021). Reflection diaries are suggested in the current research as a tool for learning of emotional awareness through this process of attending and reflecting. A *diary* can be defined as a sequential record of daily situations, with reflection being an additional layer added to the recording process. Similarly, *journaling*, a term used in psychology and healthcare, involves writing about emotional experiences. When journaling integrates emotional processing, factual information, and cognitive processing of situations, it has been demonstrated to positively affect health and facilitate post-traumatic growth. (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002).

However, the international context creates implications for emotional reflection due to the use of non-native-language in the emotional descriptions. Various researchers have discussed the implications of this phenomenon on emotional processing and expression, noting that bilinguals, for example, often experience emotional detachment when using their second language (Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Ivaz et al., 2019). The level of proficiency and age of second language acquisition have been identified as factors that create differences among bilinguals and their emotional experiences connected to language (Caldwell-Harris, 2014). Moreover, emotion procession cannot be detached from context where language is used, and therefore differences are observed between foreign classroom learning and language learned through immersion (Pavlenko, 2012).

In addition to language, other cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping emotional awareness by influencing how individuals perceive and interpret their emotions. Cultures are commonly divided into two categories: individualistic and collectivistic. Individualistic cultures are characterised by a focus on the self, whereas collectivistic cultures are more context- and society-oriented. Although the current thesis does not explicitly employ these categories, empirical findings suggest that individuals in individualistic cultures tend to exhibit higher levels of self- and emotional awareness. This is evidenced by research by English and Chen (2007), which demonstrates that individuals in individualistic cultures possess a relatively stable self-concept, while those in collectivistic cultures have a more malleable self-concept that adapts to their context. It is notable that individuals in individualistic cultures tend to place greater emphasis on their own emotional experiences when evaluating life satisfaction (Suh et al., 1998). This may result in a more nuanced emotional awareness among individuals from individualistic cultures.

2.3. Interpersonal Communication

The next core competence is situated within the social dimension, namely interpersonal communication. CASEL identifies two skills connected to the social competence of SEL: social awareness and relationship skills. Social awareness encompasses “the abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathise with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts”, while relationship skills involve “the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2020). Part of social awareness is covered in emotional awareness competence, as described earlier, which also involves understanding others’ emotions. Relationship skills then encompass other constructs such as effective communication, cultural competency, conflict management, relationship building, teamwork, and leadership (CASEL, 2020).

While all these social skills are crucial for individuals, they encompass a wide range of aspects. Consequently, the current study narrows its focus to effective interpersonal communication and its application. Sabanci and colleagues (2018, p. 178) state the goal of interpersonal communication as transferring “information, ideas, goals, directions, expectations, feelings, and

emotions” from one person to another. Based on this, the definition of interpersonal communication for the thesis is as follows:

Interpersonal communication competence is an ability of an individual to clearly and effectively communicate thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others in order to achieve mutual understanding.

Given the university setting, theoretical choices focused on communication situations within the learning environment and the potential challenges that could arise. However, while the primary focus was on the learning environment, it is crucial to recognise the broader applicability of these principles beyond the university context. Collaborative learning in teams, a common aspect of university education, underscores the importance of effective interpersonal communication skills. Specifically, communication, conflict management skills and the ability of team members to manage emotions can significantly impact team success (Johnson et al., 2007; Luca & Tarricone, 2001). In the context of collaborative work, various challenges may arise, including planning and task coordination, disproportionate member involvement, group problem-solving, decision-making, and conflicts (Johnson et al., 2007; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003; Popov et al., 2012). The international context introduces an added layer of complexity due to the multicultural nature of the setting. While certain challenges are consistent across both monocultural and multicultural groups, specific challenges in multicultural groups are connected to differences in norms, values, and views (Behfar et al., 2006). Furthermore, Popov et al. (2012) found that the most significant challenges for students in a multicultural environment are free-riding, insufficient English language skills, and struggles with communication.

The focus of the study is on one aspect of interpersonal communication, specifically conflict management, as effective conflict management can enhance the effectiveness of cooperative learning (Johnson et al., 2007). The term *conflict* is a topic of debate among numerous researchers, who emphasise different aspects of the concept while defining it (Putnam, 2013). Nevertheless, it is possible to identify certain defining features of conflict: it occurs among two or more individuals due to perceived incompatibilities in goals, values, needs, desires, or interests (Putnam, 2013). Numerous theories propose methods for managing conflicts; for the current thesis, the model of strategic conflict was chosen (Canary et al., 2013). This model is

based on the idea that people can make conscious strategic decisions at any stage of the conflict to manage its outcomes. The simplified model is presented in Figure 1, where the stages defined by Canary and colleagues (2013) are compared to the suggested skills and strategies. This study proposes the utilisation of awareness of one's own and others' emotions during the interpretation of conflict events, the implementation of feedback strategies while producing messages, and the use of active empathetic listening while receiving another person's response. Research by Sabanci et al. (2018) found that effective use of feedback and empathetic listening is positively and significantly correlated with conflict management strategies.

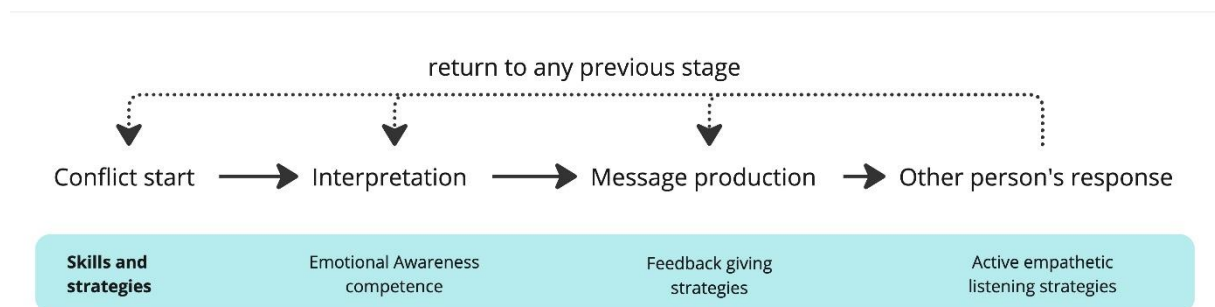


Figure 1. Model of strategic conflict, adapted from Canary et al. (2013). The skills and strategies were added to the adapted figure.

Feedback can be defined as information provided by one individual to another about their behaviour or understanding. The purpose of feedback can be to provide positive reinforcement of action or to indicate an expectation of improvement or change (Fulham et al., 2022). In the case of conflict, feedback can provide information to the other party that is useful for the further resolution of the conflict. However, not any given method of information delivery is beneficial for the recipient. Receptivity, defined as the capacity to consider the information provided by the feedback giver and to act on it, may influence the effectiveness of feedback (Fulham et al., 2022). Two suggestions are implemented for the effective delivery of feedback and enhanced receptivity: the honesty and benevolence model and the utilisation of I-messages.

The honesty and benevolence model is suggested to navigate difficult situations. In this model, honesty involves providing direct and truthful information to the recipient, while benevolence reflects a motivation to improve the recipient's wellbeing (Levine et al., 2020). Levine et al. (2020) proposed *benevolent honesty* as the most effective strategy within the model, where the communicator should focus on delivering negative information truthfully and directly, while equally considering others' wellbeing. The usual strategies for this strategy are clear statements

of benevolent intentions before honest feedback or provide resources to cope after the honest information (Levine et al., 2020).

The current research indicates that the use of I-messages, which are employed to convey thoughts, beliefs, or feelings in a non-interpretative or non-evaluative manner (Gordon, 2003, as cited in Mäkinen et al., 2021), may be beneficial for the feedback-giving. The various types of I-messages have been identified, although the majority of them focus on the description of a situation with a connection to one's own feelings (Gordon, 2003, as cited in Mäkinen et al., 2021). The last component of the message depends on the goal of communication, for instance, expecting some change, as in the case of giving feedback in a conflicting situation. This way of communication is especially effective if the communicator possesses a certain level of emotional awareness and is able to clearly communicate their feelings and reflect on them.

Furthermore, listening plays a significant role in effective interpersonal communication, with approximately 45% of communication time dedicated to this skill (Bletscher & Lee, 2021). However, active listening, which is defined as a separate competency, is considered crucial for students, supporting both learning in group settings and the development of interpersonal relationships (Bletscher & Lee, 2021). It is also important to note the distinction between active listening and active empathetic listening. Active listening involves integrating cognitive (processing), behavioural (responding), and relational (considering the relational content of the message) aspects throughout the listening process (Bletscher & Lee, 2021). Empathetic listening, on the other hand, adds an emotional dimension to this competence. Given that active empathetic listening necessitates an understanding of others' emotions, which is an element of emotional awareness.

Engaging in active empathetic listening entails not only receiving the words but also taking into account the emotional, nonverbal, and relational context before responding appropriately (Bletscher & Lee, 2021). Typically, to practise active listening, a set of nonverbal and verbal behaviours is recommended, which aim to signal approach rather than avoidance (Bodie et al., 2015). Non-verbal behaviours include head nods, eye contact, body lean, while verbal behaviours involve paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, assumption checking, and asking open-ended questions (Bodie et al., 2015). Bodie et al (2015) found that reflecting others' feelings and paraphrasing increase emotional awareness. Other verbal behaviours, such as assumption

checking and asking open-ended questions, contribute to affecting change over non-verbal behaviours during challenging communication (Bodie et al., 2015). These four strategies were then suggested to the current research participants to aid their active empathetic listening skill.

2.4. Self-regulation

The final competence addressed in the current study is self-regulation, which is partially based on CASEL’s self-management. Self-management is defined as “the abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations” (CASEL, 2020). Despite CASEL’s choice of the term self-management, the thesis employs the term *self-regulation* instead. The choice is made based on two other common terms: emotion regulation and self-regulated learning. The combination of these two skills with the concept of self-management by CASEL created the basis for the competence and will now be described in more detail.

Emotion regulation plays an important role in the self-regulation competence. Gross (1998, p.275) defines emotion regulation as “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions”. The conscious and automatic strategies to regulate emotions are distinguished based on the stages of development of emotional experience (Gross & John, 2003). The two broader categories of emotion regulation strategies are antecedent-focused and response-focused, the former occur before the emotional response, while the latter occur after the response has been generated (Gross & John, 2003). These strategies are presented in Figure 2.

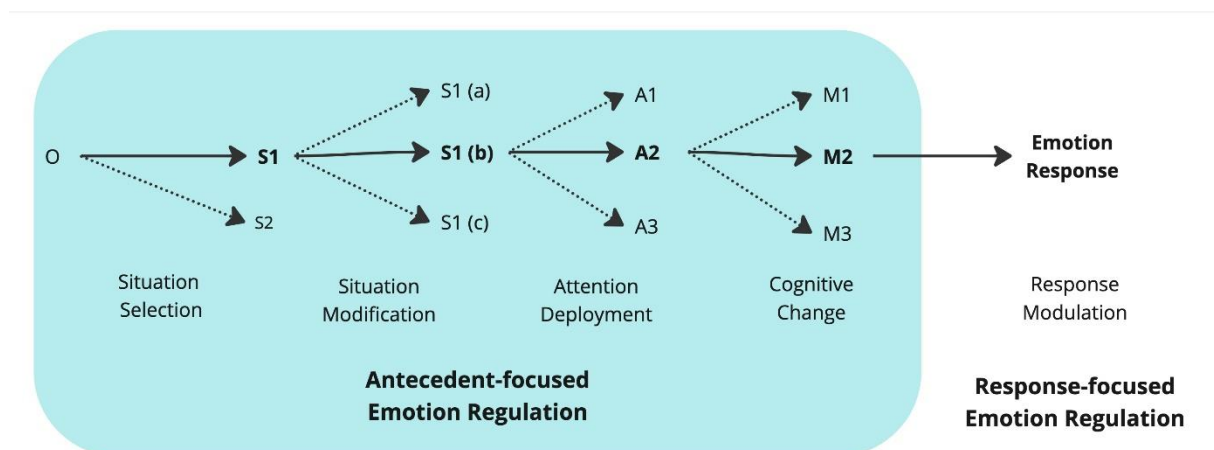


Figure 2. Emotion regulation strategies, adapted from Gross and John (2003).

S refers to situation, A refers to aspect, M refers to Meaning.

Situation selection involves choosing a situation that is likely to elicit a desired emotional response (Gross, 2001). Once selected, the situation can be modified based on its potential emotional impact, and attention can be directed towards specific aspects of the situation (Gross, 2001). Subsequently, individuals assign personal meaning to the situation. A common strategy for cognitive change is reappraisal, which entails consciously altering the interpretation of an emotional situation to modify the potential emotional response (Gross & John, 2003). The last emotion regulation strategy, response modulation refers to attempts to influence emotional expression, including strategies such as expressive suppression, which involves inhibiting emotional expression (Gross & John, 2003).

Emotion regulation has both intrapersonal and interpersonal effects, which are associated with prosocial behaviours and better social competence (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Due to social orientation, emotion regulation is influenced by cultural values and norms that help navigate social situations. According to Matsumoto and colleagues (2008, p.932), “one of the functions of culture is to create and maintain social order by creating value systems”. Matsumoto et al. (2008) researched the cultural differences in reappraisal and expressive suppression strategies. They found that different cultural display rules affect the use of expressive suppression. However, the same study did not find a connection between reappraisal and culture. Ekman and Friesen (1969) defined display rules as socially learned procedures for regulating emotional expression in various settings. Because these rules are socially learned, they are influenced by culture, as confirmed by Matsumoto (1990), who found cultural differences in the appropriateness of certain emotional expressions in different social settings. However, the international environment creates a new space where social order connected to one’s own culture might not be effective, and therefore can create misunderstandings and confusion. Learning about cultural display rules can assist in understanding others’ emotions better and in adjusting one’s own emotions based on new norms.

The second aspect of self-regulation competence is directly connected to learning. Self-regulated learning focuses on the processes through which learners regulate their learning behaviours using metacognition, motivation, and reflection (Zimmerman, 2013). This concept is particularly relevant in the context of higher education, where students are generally expected to demonstrate independence and assume responsibility for their own learning. Zimmerman (2013) proposed a cyclical model of self-regulated learning, as presented in Figure 3. This

model was chosen for the study due to its simplicity and popularity in the field (Panadero, 2017). The cyclical model has been empirically validated by several studies, one of which was conducted by DiBenedetto et al. (2010). The findings of this study indicated that individuals who exhibit higher levels of achievement tend to utilise the stages of this model during the learning process (DiBenedetto et al., 2010).

According to the model, self-regulation consists of three stages: forethought, performance and self-reflection (Figure 3). The first stage, forethought, focuses on preparation for the learning task with analysing the task, setting goals, planning, and managing expectations in relation to one's own motivations, beliefs and values (Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, 2013). The study particularly emphasised the forethought process, encouraging participants to explore their motivations and employ task analysis and goal-setting techniques based on them. Motivation in this thesis was framed through the lens of self-determination theory by Deci et al. (1991), who suggested the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation is driven by one's own interest and pleasure, with no necessity of rewards or constraints. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors and potential consequences attached to the task (Deci et al., 1991). Research suggests that intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with favourable learning outcomes (Deci et al., 1991). Furthermore, Zimmerman (2013) concluded that high self-motivation is associated with proactive behaviour, initiative, persistence, task analysis, and goal setting.

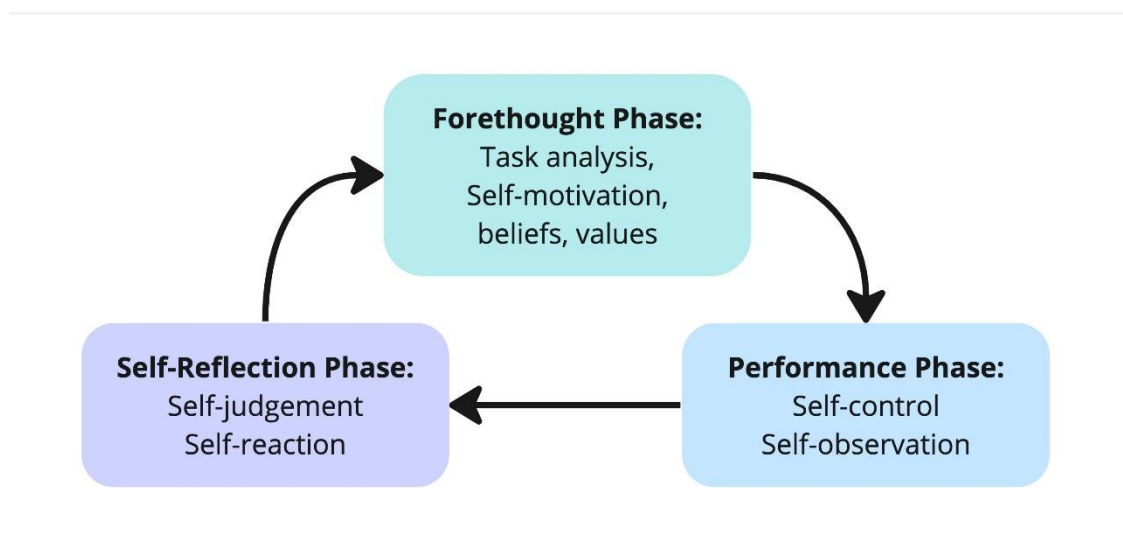


Figure 3. Cyclical model of Self-Regulated Learning, adapted from Zimmerman (2013).

Task analysis and planning are essential components for the development of effective strategies to achieve goals (Latham & Locke, 1991). Zimmerman (2013) states that breaking down large tasks into specific key components is crucial for effective task management. Furthermore, Zimmerman (2000) suggests that goal seeking behaviour is associated with intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic outcomes. The theory of goal setting was presented to the participants, which posits that human behaviour can be regulated by personal goals (Latham & Locke, 1991). Latham and Locke (1991) demonstrated that challenging and specific goals lead to higher task performance. Therefore, setting specific yet challenging goals in the forethought process facilitates self-regulation of behaviour and creates a course of action.

The subsequent stage, the performance phase, suggests that the potential for individuals to regulate their own learning performance through self-control, self-monitoring, and self-observation (Zimmerman, 2013). While Zimmerman does not explicitly mention emotions in his model (Panadero, 2017), the current thesis proposes to integrate emotional awareness and emotion regulation at the performance phase and use emotions as cues for self-control, self-monitoring, and self-observation. By adding emotion regulation to the self-regulated learning model, the researcher defined the core definition of self-regulation competence for the thesis as follows:

Self-regulation competence is an ability of an individual to regulate their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviours according to emotional cues, motivations, values and goals.

The final stage of the model is focused on reflection following the learning process, in alignment with the initial planning, as well as motivations, beliefs, or values (Zimmerman, 2013). This stage includes self-judgments and self-reactions. Self-judgments are based on the effectiveness of goal achievement, while self-reactions relate to satisfaction with one's own performance and involve making adaptations for future improvement (Zimmerman, 2013).

2.5. Summary of the theoretical framework

To provide a concise overview of the theoretical framework underpinning the study, Figure 4 presents a synthesis of the relevant theories described before. The study focuses on three competencies: emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, and self-regulation, and their relation.

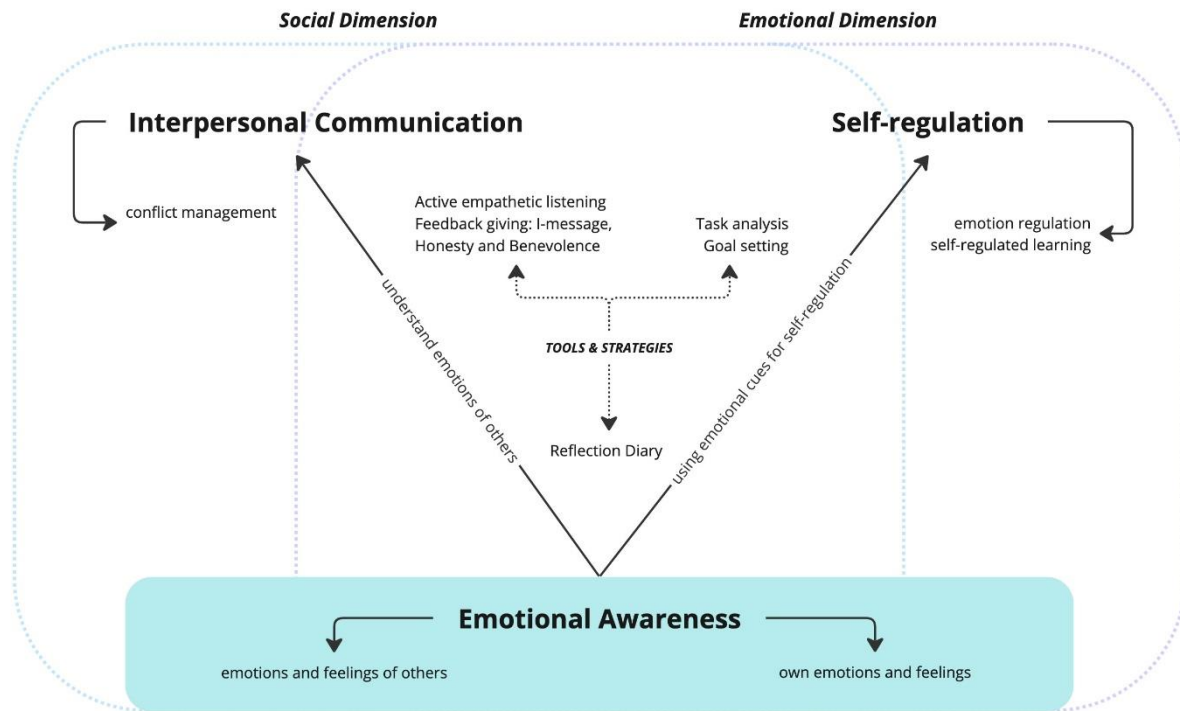


Figure 4. Theoretical framework of the study

The relation between the social and emotional dimensions of SEL can be described as interactive and intertwined. Several authors argue that emotional competence serves as the foundation for social skills (Clarke, 2010; Denham et al., 2003; Saarni, 1999, as cited in Ciarrochi et al., 2003). One major theory commonly applied in the SEL setting is the theory of emotional intelligence (EI) by Salovey and Mayer (1990, p.189), who define EI as “ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions”. In their model, they view understanding and processing emotions as the basis for other skills such as emotion regulation and utilisation of emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Instead of adopting the EI model as it is, the current study extends this concept by emphasizing emotional awareness, which involves understanding one’s own emotions as a foundation for building other skills.

It is proposed that emotional cues about one’s own emotions be used to inform self-regulation decisions, including self-control, self-monitoring, and self-observation. Similarly, cues about emotions of others are meant to support communication in social contexts, particularly in collaborative learning environments. Research has shown that emotional awareness supports critical reflection, particularly in problem analysis, action planning, and theorising cause-and-effect relationships in collaborative working environments (Clarke, 2010).

The thesis focuses on the practical implementation of the selected theories in the learning environment, with a particular emphasis on interpersonal communication and self-regulation. Consequently, the theories chosen for these areas are not comprehensive overviews of the competence, but rather focus on certain aspects useful in the chosen environment. The tools and strategies mentioned in Figure 4 are similarly focused on the practical implementation of these aspects. The subsequent chapter will explore how the intervention was designed, using and implementing the selected theories, tools and strategies, and how the study's methodology was organised.

3 Intervention Design and Methodology

3.1. Intervention design components

The current study was designed as an intervention study employing a single-case experimental design. Intervention is the usual setting to implement single-case experimental design to investigate its effectiveness (Smith, 2012). The single-case experiment differs from the common experimental group design by focusing on comparing data within subjects rather than between subjects (Smith, 2012). This approach avoids the use of a control group and instead emphasises the comparison of each individual's data within their own dataset. The primary research question explored within the context of a short-term SEL intervention is as follows:

How do students think and reflect on their social-emotional competences (specifically emotional awareness, communication, and self-regulation) throughout a short-term intervention?

To ensure the validity of the research, the usual requirement for data collection is to collect at least three data sets at various points (Smith, 2012). This requirement was satisfied in the present research design by collecting several data sets, described later, where the pre-test collected at the first intervention stage acts as a baseline for further comparison.

The intervention was organised as part of the existing introductory course provided to a group of international master's students. This intervention consisted of three sessions with a total duration of 220 minutes (3 hours and 40 minutes) and was spread across two months. Data was collected throughout the intervention and after its completion. The course was designed minding the potential needs of students, as the effectiveness of SEL is determined based on content which is relevant to the participants (Brackett et al., 2016). The needs were identified based on the researcher's personal experience in international higher education, the requests of the main instructor involved in the introductory course, and insights from the aforementioned research. The development of content that addresses both learning experiences and social and emotional competences allows for a more comprehensive approach to the student's total experience (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013).

The intervention’s design was based on the three main competences – emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, self-regulation – described in the earlier sections. An overview of the intervention schedule and duration is presented in Figure 5. The time periods between interventions were dictated by the course’s existing schedule and were not under the control of the researcher. Due to the scale of the current study, it is not possible to apply a comprehensive systematic approach to Social-Emotional Learning, and the study will only focus on classroom implementation of SEL through explicit instruction.

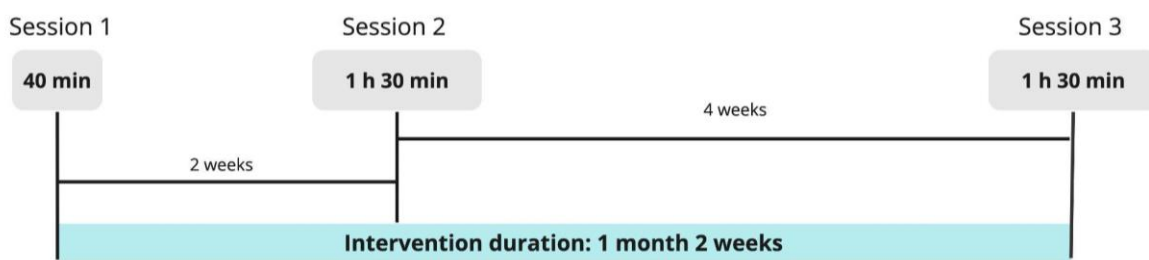


Figure 5. Schedule and duration of the SEL Intervention

Session 1 was titled “Introduction to Social-Emotional Learning: Emotional Awareness”, creating a foundation for the further intervention. The development of *emotional awareness* was planned to occur throughout the intervention via the use of a reflection diary and class activities on reflecting on interaction with other competences, allowing for a shorter lecture on *emotional awareness* theory. Session 2 covered *interpersonal communication*, and Session 3 covered *self-regulation*, which both required longer time periods to get familiar with the content. While interpersonal communication and self-regulation had longer sessions, emotional awareness received more attention due to its longitudinal practical implementation through the use of the reflection diary. This aligns with the intervention’s intention that emotional awareness should serve as a basis for the other two competences.

The learning in the intervention is perceived through the constructivist theory, which sees knowledge as a result of mental construction of new information to pre-existing knowledge and experiences (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). The constructivist approach utilises a range of interactive materials, encouraging students to engage in dialogue and ask questions. (Brooks and Brooks, 1993, as cited in Bada & Olusegun, 2015)

Furthermore, given that the intervention primarily targets adults, the researcher based the design of it on adult learning theory. This theory identifies six core principles of adult learning: “(1) the learner’s need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn” (Knowles et al., 2014, p. 4). The first principle was addressed by providing a rationale for the SEL and targeting potential students’ needs. To align with adults’ self-concept as responsible for their own learning, participants were given explicit learning objectives along with clear instructions. Prior experiences of the learners were particularly emphasised through discussions that encouraged participants to connect newly acquired knowledge to their cultural contexts and daily lives. Readiness to learn was fostered by tying the content to relevant experiences in their studies, as the intervention was part of an introductory course and related to starting and navigating their academic journey in a new context. The final two principles, orientation to learning and motivation to learn, were beyond the researcher’s direct control and therefore were not specifically addressed. The process model of implementation, as proposed by Knowles et al. (2014), places the adult learner at the centre of the process, with the content structured around their needs. However, it was not feasible to implement this approach, as the intervention content was important for the researcher, thus it was decided to use the content model instead, where content is sequential and driven by the instructor.

Another important aspect of the context was multiculturalism. To address this, Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2018) proposed using culturally relevant pedagogy, which involves incorporating students’ knowledge, facilitating multicultural communication, and implementing cooperative learning activities to integrate culture into social-emotional learning. To integrate culturally relevant pedagogy, instructional content needs to meet the needs of international students and provide opportunities to develop competences based on individuals’ own cultural backgrounds and practices (Yeh et al., 2021). These approaches were achieved by integrating explicit discussions among students on cultural topics and the connection of SEL competences to their own experiences. These discussions were grounded in students’ awareness and knowledge about their own cultures, serving as a foundation for meaningful dialogue.

3.1.1. Session 1. Introduction to Social-Emotional Learning. Emotional awareness

The first session was designed in the form of a lecture, where the instructor provided structured and concise information on the topic. While lectures are often regarded as unappealing by students, they can be employed to provide context and structure at the beginning of the course (French & Kennedy, 2017). This aligns with the primary objective of the first session, which was to introduce students to the topic of social-emotional learning and its benefits, as well as to the concept of emotional awareness and its application in daily life.

The secondary aim was to acquaint students with the research, explain the conditions of privacy and confidentiality, and obtain consent forms from willing participants. The session was planned with 5 minutes allocated for research introduction, 15 minutes for the pre-test, and 20 minutes for the lecture on Social-Emotional Learning and emotional awareness. The research was introduced verbally to the students, and printed privacy notices and consent forms were distributed. After informing the students about the research aims, confidentiality and anonymity of data, and the data collection schedule, the pre-test was collected.

The pre-test comprised questions on prior knowledge and previous training on Social-Emotional Learning, the definition of Social-Emotional Learning, self-reported six-point Likert scales on emotional awareness, communication, and self-regulation, along with an open-ended question to elaborate on the scores in written format. The full pre-test content is presented in Appendix A. Additionally, an imaginary scenario was provided for the guided reflection.

Imaginary scenarios are one of the methods used to assess various social-emotional skills by prompting individuals to anticipate feelings and actions that might arise in a given situation, while applying their personal perspective. For instance, the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS) assesses emotional awareness skills, while the Dealing with Challenging Interactions (DCI) assessment evaluates SEL course outcomes through reflections on various imaginary scenarios (Lane & Smith, 2021; Mäkinen et al., 2021).

The scenario collected through the survey was designed not to assess emotional awareness, as LEAS measurement, but also to facilitate reflection and to explore the potential integration of two other skills in the participants' reflections. This scenario text was created by the researcher based on the university study context to provide an easily imaginable situation for the students.

The problem is based on constructive controversy, described by Johnson and colleagues (2007), which is a common occurrence in collaborative work. This controversy arises when group members hold different perceptions, opinions, or reasoning, and they must reach a consensus to complete a task. The scenario text was as follows:

You were assigned a group project with three of your classmates. When you start working on it together, the disagreement about chosen research methodology between you and one of your groupmates arises. You argue about it and cannot come to any conclusion. The project is not moving forward until your group decides on the methodology. You should submit your project by the deadline as it is a part of a mandatory course.

There were three questions asked to support the reflection based on three main skills introduced in the intervention. “*What do you feel in this situation?*” targeting the *emotional awareness* skill, “*What do you think is needed from you to continue the project?*” prompting students to use *self-regulation*, and “*How would you communicate with others in this situation?*” addressing *interpersonal communication*.

The content of the lecture, which occurred after the completion of the pre-test, is presented in Table 2 under the column “Planned content in chronological order” while the intended learning outcomes are outlined in the column labelled “Learning outcomes”. The lecture was structured as a concise summary of scientific articles and books on the relevant topics. Several activities were initially planned for the lecture: (1) a small-group discussion on cultural display rules, and (2) a reflective exercise on participants’ emotions in the moment. However, due to the pre-test and consent collection taking longer than anticipated, adjustments were made. The first activity was modified to an open question posed to the class, allowing for the sharing of perspectives, while the second activity was omitted entirely. A few key articles from the lecture were provided in the online learning space as an optional reading after the class. However, it is impossible to know if students engaged with them or not.

Table 2. Planned content and learning outcomes of Session 1

Session name	Format	Planned content in chronological order	Learning outcomes
Introduction to Social-Emotional Learning. Emotional awareness	Lecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL Framework by CASEL, importance of SEL. • Three skills of the intervention: Emotional awareness, Interpersonal communication, Self-regulation • What is emotion? (theory) • <i>Group discussion*</i>. Cultural display rules • Emotional awareness (theory) • <i>Reflection*</i>. What do you feel? • How to identify emotions (tools) • Introduction to reflection diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the concept and application of Social-Emotional Learning. • Become acquainted with the three core skills addressed in the intervention. • Understand what emotion is and get familiar with the strategies for identifying personal emotions. • Gain awareness of the concept of emotional awareness and its application in daily life.

Note. Activities marked with stars were modified due to the limited time.

This served two purposes: firstly, as an intervention tool, and secondly, as a data collection method. The students were provided with clear instructions, along with an example of a completed diary entry. Furthermore, they were given the opportunity to ask questions. As an intervention tool, the reflection diary was provided to students as a take-home assignment in either paper or digital format, depending on their preferences. The diary required them to record at least six entries, with two entries after each session, detailing various situations that elicited emotional responses. The aim of the diary was to encourage participants to practise reflection and emotional awareness competence. The diary consists of five columns labelled as “Date”, “Name emotions you feel. What do you feel?”, “Reflect on the situation. What situation caused this emotion?”, “Behaviours or actions this emotion caused. How did you act in this situation?”, and “Describe your thoughts. What are your thoughts connected to the emotion?”. The diary also included tools to support the description of emotions, such as adaptation of Plutchik’s emotion wheel (Plutchik, 1980), hierarchical emotion words list (Shaver et al., 1987). Another approach to understanding emotions involves attending to bodily sensations to recognize the associated emotions. Nummenmaa and colleagues (2014) studied the bodily sensations of participants during various emotional experiences. Conducted with 701 participants, the study found consistent results across Western European and East Asian samples, suggesting universal bodily maps for different emotions. Further research by Volynets and colleagues (2020) confirmed the consistency of these maps across various cultures. The maps were suggested to be utilised as a valuable reference tool when reflecting on one’s own emotions and comparing one’s bodily sensations to the emotion labels. In the context of the

current intervention, the majority of participants will be required to practise emotional awareness and describe their emotions in a foreign language. Consequently, the competence development of these individuals may be influenced, which represents a limitation of the current study. The diary structure is presented in the Appendix B. The first prompt guiding reflection after the first intervention session was free and sounded as “*Make at least two separate entries about any of your emotions in your free time*”. The idea behind the prompt was to not limit students on situations they reflect on and have them choose freely.

Additionally, the reflection diary served as a data collection tool aimed at gaining insight into the development of the *emotional awareness* skill, as well as the potential application of other introduced skills (*interpersonal communication* and *self-regulation*) outside of the class context. Given that learning and change happens over the time, these diaries might help to capture the nature of the process (Clarke, 2010). However, it was lately removed from the analysis due to its irrelevance for the main research question.

3.1.2. Session 2. Interpersonal Communication

The second session was designed in a format of seminar, where new content delivered as a lecture was combined with several active discussions on the new content and its integration with previous content and daily life. The planned content and learning outcomes of the seminar are presented in Table 3.

Berkhof and colleagues (2011) concluded that small group discussions were potentially beneficial for communication skills trainings, although not many sources confirmed that. Nevertheless, the researcher decided to implement discussions to actively involve students in learning and knowledge construction. The first discussion was organised into small groups of 4–5 people, prompting them to reflect on the connection between emotional awareness introduced in the previous class and interpersonal communication, which was the main focus of the second session. After the discussion, students had the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts with the class. Subsequently, further information was introduced to support the conclusions drawn by the students.

Table 3. Planned content and learning outcomes of Session 2

Session name	Format	Planned content in chronological order	Learning Outcomes
Interpersonal Communication Skills	Seminar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Group discussion</i> about connection between emotional awareness and interpersonal communication • Active empathetic listening • <i>Pair discussion</i> on cultural norms in communication • Communication in challenging situations. • Model of Strategic Conflict. • Giving feedback (Honesty and Benevolence Model; I-messages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw connections between <i>emotional awareness</i> and various situations connected to <i>interpersonal communication</i>. • Understand the concept of active listening, experience it during an in-class activity, and reflect on the experience. • Become aware of cultural differences that might affect communication and interaction. • Explore how various challenging situations affect communication and identify strategies to manage them. • Understand how feedback can be conceptualised, how it can be given effectively, and experience giving feedback during the in-class activity.

One of the core concepts introduced as a part of interpersonal communication skill was active empathetic listening, which was then suggested for practice during the upcoming pair discussion. The topic of discussion centred around cultural beliefs and traditions. The aim of the exercise was to enhance understanding of various cultural differences in an international setting while practising the newly introduced skill of active empathetic listening.

The final part of the seminar focused on challenging situations, conflict theories and proposed the application of feedback-giving skills, specifically utilising the Honesty and Benevolence model (Levine et al., 2020) and the I-message method (Gordon, 2003, as cited in Mäkinen et al., 2021).

At the end of the seminar, students were invited to think about their in-class experiences through a survey. The survey (Appendix C) consisted of a combination of open-ended and Likert-scale questions, prompting students to reflect on two discussions held in class (group and pair), as well as their overall learning experience. As part of the survey, students were also asked to provide feedback on the session, applying the principles of feedback-giving learned during the seminar. This activity was intended to offer students an opportunity to practise and reinforce the information introduced. The data from the survey was also collected for potential analysis.

As a take-home assignment, students were expected to make new entries in the reflection diary. The second prompt sounded as “*Make at least two separate entries: one about any situation connected to communication in a challenging situation, one where you used active listening with someone*”. This prompt aims to continue practising emotional awareness while also incorporating the skills introduced in the interpersonal communication seminar.

3.1.3. Session 3. Self-regulation

The second session was designed in a format of workshop, where the focus was on the active interaction with the learning materials and application of it to the daily situations. The planned content and learning outcomes of the seminar are presented in Table 4. The session started with a short discussion in small groups of 4–5 people, prompting to reflect on the connection between *emotional awareness* introduced in the first class and *self-regulation*, as well as on self-regulation in students’ cultural context. After the discussion, students had the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts with the class.

Table 4. Planned content and learning outcomes of Session 3

Session name	Format	Planned content in chronological order	Learning Outcomes
Interpersonal Communication Skills	Seminar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional awareness and self-regulation. • <i>Discussion</i> on the connection of self-regulation and emotional awareness • Project Management. Self-regulation Model. • <i>Workshop</i> on project management with learning material <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Learning material:</i> Goals, Motivation, Task Planning, Emotional Regulation, Resource Management, Self-judgement and Self-reaction) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw connections between emotional awareness and self-regulation. • Reflect on personal goals and motivations in relation to self-regulated learning. • Understand core concepts related to self-regulation. • Apply project management skills to a real-life example while learning theories and tools associated with self-regulation presented during the session.

The main focus of the workshop was to manage personal project(s) using the short lecture and printed learning material (Appendix D) provided to each student. The approach is based on the constructivist theory of learning, which states that new knowledge is constructed through the interaction with existing information (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). The aim of the activity was to

make students actively interact with the theories and apply it to relevant problems from their daily life and experiences.

At the end of the workshop, similarly to the Session 2, students were invited to think about their in-class experiences through a survey. The survey (Appendix E) consisted of a combination of open-ended and Likert-scale questions, prompting students to reflect on the discussion, project management activity and general learning in class. The data from the survey was also collected for further analysis.

As a last take-home assignment from the intervention, students were expected to make two final entries in the reflection diary. The last prompt sounded as *“Make at least two separate entries about any situation where you tried to regulate yourself. Describe how your emotions, thoughts, and behaviours changed after self-regulation”*. This prompt aimed to capture the active use of self-regulation in connection with emotional awareness.

Following the intervention, students were given a week to submit their reflection diaries. However, some students took longer to complete them, resulting in variations in the timeline of diary entries. The dates of the entries were asked from students, although, there is no way to verify them, and therefore no definite conclusions on the timeline can be made.

3.2. Participants

The initial sample of the study consisted of 15 international master's students. Convenience sampling was used due to the limitation of access of the researcher to other groups of students.

During the intervention, two participants were absent from one of the key sessions related to Interpersonal Communication skills. Therefore, they did not receive the intended content of the intervention and were subsequently excluded from further data analysis. One of the participants did not complete a reflection diary. The diary served two functions: as part of the intervention to develop emotional awareness skills, and as a data source. As it was essential for the participants to engage with the full intervention content, the data of the participant was removed from the data set. Furthermore, three participants did not participate in the follow-up survey conducted three months after the completion of the intervention. As pre-test, post-test, and

follow-up surveys are essential for the validity of the single-case experimental design, the data from these participants were excluded from the analysis.

Table 5. List of participants

Participant	Native language	English language comfort	Prior knowledge of Social-Emotional Learning
P1	English	Comfortable	No prior knowledge or training
P2	Other than English	Comfortable	
P3	Other than English	Comfortable	
P4	Other than English	Comfortable	
P5	Other than English	Comfortable	Some prior knowledge, no formal training
P6	Other than English	Somewhat uncomfortable	
P7	Other than English	Somewhat comfortable	
P8	Other than English	Somewhat comfortable	Prior knowledge through formal education or training
P9	Other than English	Comfortable	

After these exclusions, the final sample with complete data across different data collection sessions consisted of nine students. The final list of participants and their information is presented in Table 5. The participants are categorised according to their self-reported prior knowledge of social and emotional learning. Participants 1 to 4 were categorised as those with no prior knowledge, participants 5 to 7 as those with some knowledge but no formal training, and participants 8 to 9 as those who had received formal SEL training before. Most of the participants were not native English-speakers, while the data was collected in English. As previously discussed, the use of a second language may result in an emotional detachment, which could potentially impact the depth and richness of descriptions. However, given that six out of nine participants reported being comfortable expressing their feelings and thoughts in English, it is unlikely that this will have a significant impact.

3.3. Data collection

The data were collected during the intervention and after its completion. An overview of the data collection schedule is presented in Table 6. Two main data collection methods were employed: surveys and the diary. The surveys were designed as a combination of six-point Likert-scale-based questions and open-ended questions, while the diary captured a structured reflection guided by several open-ended questions. A detailed description of each method and its composition will be provided in the subsequent sections in connection with the organised intervention sessions.

Table 6. Data Collection Schedule

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3		
	<i>Intervention</i>			<i>3 weeks after</i>	<i>3 months after</i>
Data method: survey	Pre-test	After-Class Reflection 1	After-Class Reflection 2	Post-test	Follow-up
Data method: diary	Reflection Diary*				

Note. *The diary entries were intended to be written during the intervention period. Each participant was tasked with writing two entries after each intervention session. The diaries were collected from the participants after Session 3.

The first three surveys and reflection diary were described in the context of the sessions in which they were presented to the participants. The post-test and follow-up data were collected following the conclusion of the intervention. The post-test was conducted in survey format three weeks after the completion of the intervention. The timing was chosen to accommodate the students' pre-existing schedule. It was presented in person to the participants and was designed to take up 20 minutes of their time.

The structure of the post-test mirrored that of the pre-test with minor adjustments. The sections covering SEL knowledge and definition, self-reported scales on the three core skills, and situation reflection remained unchanged, intended for comparison with the baseline data from the pre-test. Additionally, a new section was included in the post-test, which asked questions about the application of SEL knowledge, and tools introduced in class, along with a separate

set of questions on the use of reflection diaries. The full content post-test is presented in Appendix F.

The follow-up test was conducted in the new semester, three months after the end of the intervention. Researchers suggest that interventions aimed at developing social-emotional skills should assess the long-term effects of learning retention after the intervention, as some changes may only manifest after a longer period (Kotsou et al., 2019). However, due to the timeframe of the Master's thesis, gathering follow-up data from participants six months after the intervention was not feasible. Therefore, three months were chosen as a compromise between time constraints and the recommended approach.

The follow-up survey was distributed via email, with two opportunities for completion, with two separate deadlines. As the previous surveys were collected in person, participants had dedicated time and space to complete them. The revised format of delivery may result in the withdrawal of three participants due to the differing circumstances and the necessity to dedicate their own time to complete it.

The main section, comprising self-reported scales on the three core skills, remained unchanged in the follow-up. However, the sections on SEL knowledge and definition, and situation reflection were removed based on participant feedback regarding the survey's length. Since the survey was delivered via email, this decision aimed to simplify the survey for participants and mitigate potential withdrawals. The follow-up survey also included questions on the application of SEL knowledge and tools introduced in class, along with a separate set of questions on the use of reflection diaries. Additionally, the survey included self-reported questions about the impact of the intervention on participants' SEL skills. However, these questions were unintentionally marked as optional, resulting in incomplete responses from some participants. The full content of the follow-up test is presented in Appendix G.

3.4. Ethical considerations and researcher's positionality

All participants were informed about the study procedures through verbal presentation and provided with a written privacy notice (Appendix H), after which they signed the consent form presented in Appendix I. Participants' names were collected to match multiple sources of data

but were not stored and were replaced by numerical identifiers. Participants were given the freedom to express their experiences, feelings, and views in various data collections. In cases where the dataset contained sensitive information that could lead to the identification of the subject, this information was anonymised by replacing it with code words (e.g., replacing “Boston” with “City X”). Additionally, background information such as native language (English or other) and preference of language use in describing feelings was collected. However, more personal information such as age, gender, or country of origin was not collected due to the small group size and the potential breach of anonymity.

Participants were informed about their right to withdraw consent at any point during or after the study. Additional consent was also obtained for each survey to provide participants with more opportunities to withdraw consent without directly communicating with the researcher, which might be uncomfortable.

As the researcher shares the background as an international master’s student with participants, certain biases and threats to objectivity can arise. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the author’s positionality. Due to the similarity of the context and experiences of the researcher as an international student, the intervention design choices were made with the knowledge of context and potential students’ needs. While this might create a threat to objectivity, it also provides a rationale behind decisions which otherwise required empirical data collection, which was not feasible at the time.

Furthermore, the researcher’s experiences may also influence the analysis and interpretation of the data. As the researcher is mindful and reflexive of their position, they have paid particular attention during the analysis to avoid over-interpreting the voices of the participants and to focus on stating what participants said. The interactive and systematic process was applied to ensure trustworthiness. The potential limitations of this approach will be explicitly discussed in further parts.

3.5. Data analysis

The study was designed using a predominantly qualitative approach. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods, inferential conclusions could not be done due to the small sample size. However, the main focus of this research is the qualitative data collected through multiple open-ended question surveys and reflection diaries. Thematic analysis, chosen for its flexible yet systematic approach, was used to analyse this data. Thematic analysis as a method involves recognizing, analysing, and describing patterns within the data, which are then labelled as themes representing significant concepts related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of qualitative analysis follows the proposed by Braun and Clarke's guidelines with adjustments based on the nature of data. The phases in the thematic analysis are: (1) familiarising with data, (2) creating first codes, (3) searching for themes within codes, (4) reviewing themes and creating a thematic map, (5) defining and labelling themes, and (6) reporting the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each of these steps will be described in detail based on the choices made by the researcher on each stage of the analysis.

The research question aims to observe students' descriptions and reflections on their social-emotional skills throughout the intervention. As the in-class reflection surveys focused on learning outcomes, they were excluded from the analysis at this stage. Therefore, the subsequent analysis was conducted based on the open-ended responses from the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up surveys.

The data collected from five surveys was compiled into a single spreadsheet and read through for initial familiarisation. Questions targeting each competency were initially reviewed across all participants first. However, due to the single-case experimental design, organising the data together in one document did not facilitate analysis. Consequently, the data was reorganised manually, allowing for a deeper familiarity with the data. Each person was treated as a distinct case, and their data was examined separately. At this stage, reflection diaries were also incorporated into the data and reviewed alongside other instances.

In the second stage, codes are used to describe elements or aspects of data interesting to a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, the researcher directed attention to each

social-emotional competence individually. The coding process did not centre on single isolated responses, but rather on the relationships between responses across the three surveys.

The reflection diary was also coded based on the three competences. However, during this stage, it was noted that reflection diaries tended to describe situations rather than provide insights into the participants' thoughts and reflections on the competences themselves. As a result, they were excluded from further analysis.

After the initial coding was done, the researcher looked into the recurring patterns across participants to create the themes. Theme is a piece of information about data which represents a pattern or meaning within data in relation to a research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were created inductively, which means they were linked to the data itself and not to preceding theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the process of theme creation, some of the themes were divided in sub-themes to capture a greater detail about the data. The frequency for themes' occurrence was decided based on the number of participants mentioning something in relation to each theme. However, worth noting that in thematic analysis the frequency of appearance does not identify the importance of it (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following two phases were combined into one for simplification. In this stage, the coding excerpts were grouped based on potential themes and reviewed once again. Some themes were deleted due to insufficient data to support them, while others were combined because of their similarity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, a thematic map was constructed based on the selected themes and their sub-themes, which will be presented later alongside the findings.

3.6. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba's (1985, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017) criteria – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability – were considered. *Credibility* refers to the accuracy of respondents' responses aligning with the research aims (Nowell et al., 2017). Only data relevant to the research question was analysed, with the research aims always in mind. Moreover, collaborative techniques such as peer debriefing or researcher triangulation are typically employed to address credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). However, due to the nature of the Master's thesis, collaborative work on research

was not feasible. Instead, the single researcher engaged with the data in a systematic iterative process as described above to ensure credibility.

Transferability concerns the generalisability of findings to different contexts or settings (Nowell et al., 2017). While difficult to achieve in qualitative research due to its focus on case-to-case examples (Nowell et al., 2017), the current research aimed to provide comprehensive descriptions of each participant and their quotes in relation to the findings, enabling readers to assess the transferability of the findings to other contexts without assuming it.

Dependability refers to the logical description of the process, its traceability, and documentation, allowing readers to judge it based on the description (Nowell et al., 2017). The current thesis aimed to describe all steps and decisions thoroughly in the *Methodology and Intervention Design* section as well as in the current *Data Analysis* section.

Conformability is achieved when three previous criteria are met (Nowell et al., 2017). It is concerned with how interpretations were made and how they were derived from data (Nowell et al., 2017). Similarly to the previous criteria, the narrative of the thesis aims to disclose the process in detail, providing a basis for readers to understand the researcher's interpretations.

4 Findings

The described analysis resulted in four major themes presented below in Figure 6. The detailed table of themes and their frequency is presented in Appendix J. Quotes are employed as illustrative examples to demonstrate how the findings are reflected in the data. The wording and spelling used in the responses were not altered. However, it is noteworthy that some participants did not allow the use of direct quotations necessitating the use of paraphrasing. For the purpose of anonymisation, each participant has been assigned a numerical identifier, as detailed in Table 2 (Chapter 3.1).

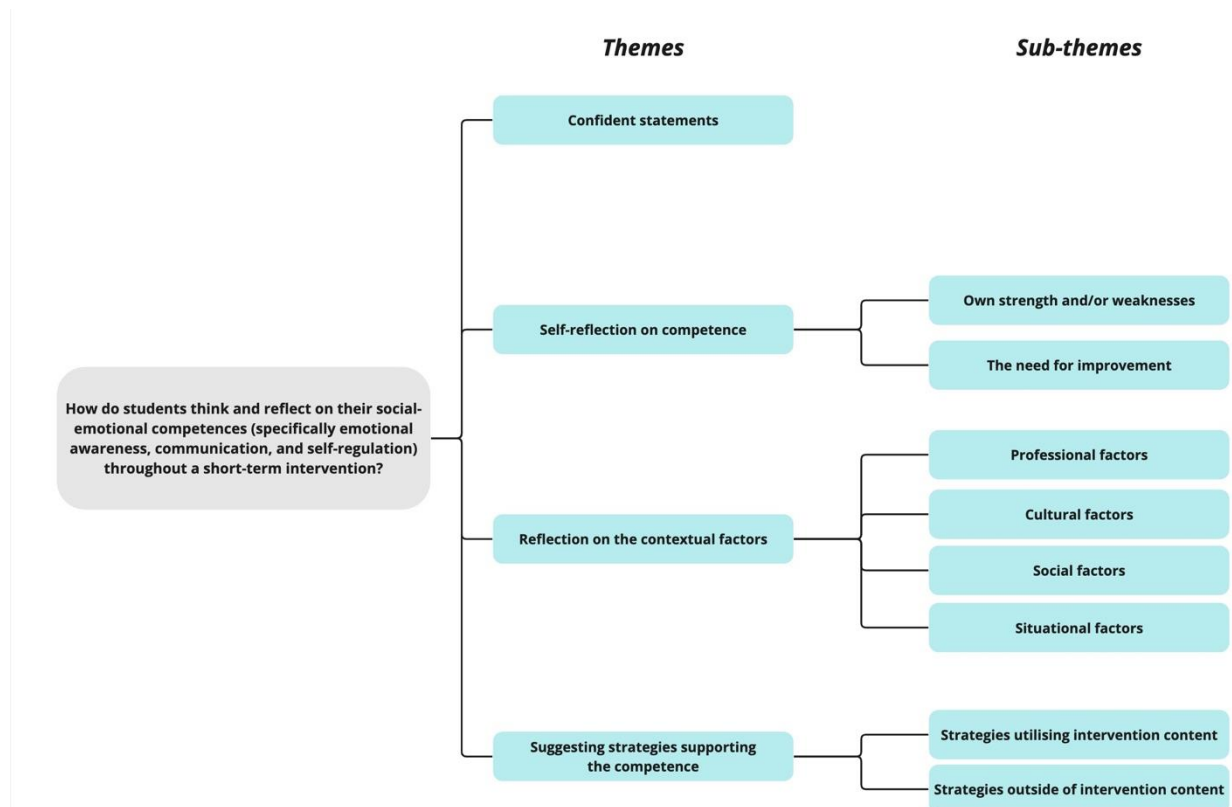


Figure 6. Thematic map

Although these themes exhibited a degree of consistency across the three skills, their frequency and emerging sub-themes varied depending on the specific skill being examined. Thus, findings will be discussed separately in the relation to each skill.

4.1. Emotional Awareness

Emotional awareness was explicitly addressed in the surveys in the form of Likert-scale questions on three statements and the overall score of the competence. The three statements were:

I am able to consciously identify my emotions

I am able to describe my emotions with words

I am able to reflect on my emotions and recognise my thoughts and behaviours related to my emotions

In the surveys, the open-ended question served as a complementary component to the overall score, aiming to elaborate the thinking behind participants' self-reported skill assessments. In the context of this research, emotional awareness competence was defined as a combination of the aforementioned aspects. Consequently, it was anticipated that participants who rated themselves highly in emotional awareness aspects would also assign high scores to the overall statement.

Notably, differences in participants' prior knowledge were not reflected in their scores, as all individuals rated their overall emotional awareness skills in the above-average range (overall competence $M=4.6$ at pre-test, $M=4.8$ at post-test, $M=4.9$ at follow-up). This is a logical consequence of the fact that emotional awareness develops in individuals as they grow older, and that adults are expected to demonstrate a certain degree of proficiency in this area (Lane & Smith, 2021).

The first theme found in the data was *confident statements*, which were used by participants in the open-ended responses while describing some aspects of their emotional awareness competence. For example, **P2** stated in pre-test that they are able to recognise their emotions, as well as reflect on them, and again mentioned their ability to recognise and reflect on emotions in follow-up. Similarly, **P4** was confident in identifying emotions in most of the situations in pre-test and in the post-test with addition of reflection.

Some participants stated their previous interest or experiences with the emotional awareness in pre-test which then manifested in other surveys in the confident statements.

P8: “*I have been very interested in emotional awareness ...*” (pre-test)

“*I can identify my emotions and discuss them with others or reflect them by myself*” (follow-up)

P9: “*I have a habit to keep my emotions diary ...*” (pre-test)

“*I am able to consciously identify my emotions*” (post-test)

Confident statements can portray participants’ self-efficacy beliefs which can then manifest in the desired behaviour (Brackett et al., 2016). Consequently, the presence of confident statements by participants may potentially impact their emotional awareness competence application in daily life.

The subsequent group of responses was capturing the *self-reflection on competence* of participants. A number of participants demonstrated the capacity to reflect on their abilities and identify their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, some participants highlighted the challenges associated with the use of words to describe emotions.

P6: “... *I sometimes do not know how I can explain my emotion*” (post-test)

P9: “... *sometimes I have challenges to use words to describe them*” (post-test)

The participants were provided with a number of tools designed to assist them in labelling their emotions. Both participants reported utilising the hierarchical emotion words list proposed by Shaver and colleagues (1987) and the continuous use of the diary after the end of sessions. However, it is important to note that the changes in emotional competence may not be immediately apparent following an intervention (Kotsou et al., 2019). Regrettably, the participants did not revisit the description of the same challenge in the follow-up to observe further changes in this aspect.

Furthermore, some participants reported experiencing difficulties in reflecting on their emotions.

P4: “*I can identify and explain my emotion but not good at reflect*” (pre-test)

P7: “... *I know that I need to improve ...*”
(pre-test)

P7: “*I think there’s always something to improve and I am not perfect at those skills ...*”
(post-test)

P7: “*I think I still need to improve my emotional awareness skill, especially, recognizing my thoughts and behaviors related to my emotions*” (follow-up)

While **P4**’s statement was present in the pre-test and reflects self-awareness existing before intervention, the subsequent examples indicate that reflections addressing specific areas for improvement emerged only after the intervention. Rodgers (2002) described reflection stages based on Dewey’s work on thinking, where an experience is followed by its interpretation and the identification of a related problem. It could signify that engaging in reflective exercises on emotional awareness throughout the intervention prompted reflection and let participants to recognise their own challenges. This observation suggests that the intervention context and active engagement with the topic may have triggered the reflective process among participants. However, the subsequent stage of reflection, namely the identification of potential explanations for the problem (Rodgers, 2002), was not a prominent feature of the participants’ responses.

Although the subsequent theme was less frequently observed, it was considered a distinct theme in comparison to the previous one, where participants reflected on their internal processes and feelings of self. In the theme named *reflection on the contextual factors*, participants were able to recognise external factors that influenced their emotional awareness competence. Three participants indicated that their emotional awareness is not as effective in specific situations. However, the descriptions of these situations were not particularly detailed. For example, **P4** states that in some situations they misunderstand their own feelings in the post-test, while **P5** writes “*In the complex situation, my emotional awareness doesn’t work well*” in the follow-up. This might indicate that they were not able to recall the particular example, or alternatively, it could be a strategy to save time while filling in the survey. Nevertheless, the ability to identify that emotional awareness is situational demonstrates active thinking about competence and some level of self-awareness.

P3 interestingly mentions the concrete example of a situation in both post-test and follow-up, which identifies the strong effect of a particular situation for participant’s emotional expression.

P3: *“When I m hurt, I can’t express my emotions ...”* (post-test) *“Still, I am not comfortable in expressing my feelings when I’m hurt by others’ actions ...”* (follow-up)

As with the previous theme, these reflections were predominantly observed in the post-test and follow-up phases. This also supports the notion that, as a result of the participants’ increased reflection during the intervention, they were able to identify several external factors that influence their competence.

The final theme identified from the data was *suggesting strategies supporting the competence development*. Of particular interest to the researcher was the extent to which the intervention content was utilised by the participants. A number of participants indicated that the reflection diary or a similar tool was beneficial to them.

P3: *“The emotional Diary helped me to reflect on my emotions and behaviours”* (follow-up)

P6: *“I sometimes write down my feeling on my dairy. It is helpful to notice my feeling and express it in my own words”* (follow-up)

P8: *“I reflect on my emotions and write them down...”* (post-test)

It is unclear whether **P8** had the habit of writing their emotions down before the intervention due to their previous interest in the topic. However, it can be assumed that **P3** and **P6** began using it during the intervention and observed its effects. Furthermore, **P6** confirmed in the post-test and follow-up survey that they continued to use the reflection diary after the intervention.

Another strategy identified by participants as useful for their emotional awareness skill, which was not suggested in the intervention content, was discussing their emotions with others.

P7: *“I think I can be able to be aware of my emotions and describe them thanks to the fact that I can talk about them with my family ...”* (pre-test)

P8: *“... I talk about my emotions with other people”* (post-test)

P9: *“...Maybe having a chat with my friends will help, since I enjoy the person that I trust ask me some questions to help me clarify my thoughts and emotions”* (follow-up)

It is noteworthy that all three participants who mentioned this strategy reported prior familiarity, interest, or experience with the intervention topics before the intervention commenced. This indicates that their recommendation was informed by personal experience. Such a strategy is logical, as the verbal description of emotions parallels written expression, although in a different modality.

4.2. Interpersonal Communication

The second area of the intervention focus was interpersonal communication, which participants assessed through Likert-scale responses to three statements, including:

I am able to be attentive and listen to others actively

I am aware of other's emotions when I interact with them

I am able to solve situations related to challenging communication such as conflicts or giving constructive feedback

Similarly to the case of emotional awareness scoring, the prior knowledge in SEL did not have the impact of the difference among participants' scoring of their overall competence, most scores were within four-five range (Overall competence M=4.4 in pre-test, M=4.8 in post-test, M=4.8 in follow-up).

The first group of responses to the interpersonal communication section were defined by *confident statements*, particularly in relation to listening skills. For example, **P2** highlighted their ability to listen effectively in the pre-test. Others also mentioned it in the later surveys:

P6: *"I'm able to **listen actively** to others ..."* (follow-up)

P7: *"... the **listening** aspect. I think I'm very good at this last one even if it is with my family or with others...."* (post-test)

P9: *"I am an **active listener** ..."* (post-test)

As participants engaged in active listening exercises during class sessions and reflected on these experiences in their diaries, it is possible that the intervention influenced their awareness of this skill.

Another noteworthy observation from **P9** participant was their ability to recognise the emotions of others, both during the post-test and follow-up periods. Providing an example in the follow-up supports the participant's understanding of their ability.

P9: “*I ... have **empathy on others feelings***” (post-test)

P9: “*I am aware of other's emotions when I interact with them. For example, from other's tone of voice and their body language.*” (follow-up)

This aspect was not identified in the pre-test, and it is possible that due to the intervention component focusing on emotional awareness and communication skills' interaction, **P9** was able to address this notion in later surveys.

The reflection process shown within *self-reflection on competence* theme deepens the participants' understanding of their own competence and provides them with information that can be used to inform future improvements. One noteworthy example is **P6**'s reflection on their weakness in conflict management throughout all three surveys. While the intervention addressed the topic of challenging situations and, in particular, conflicts, it did not have an impact on the participants' thinking.

P6: “*...I don't like solve confliotions*” (pre-test)

P6: “*I am not good at ... solve conflicts...*” (post-test)

P6: “*However I'm not good at having a challenging conversation in difficult situation*” (follow-up)

Additionally, participant **P8** employed a reflective approach to all their responses related to communication addressing various aspects. In comparison to the other responses, this participant proceeded to the subsequent stage of reflection, which aims to explain the problem and to formulate a hypothesis (Rodgers, 2002).

P8: “*This has been difficult for me since I sometimes struggle with expressing myself and detecting other people's true intentions and emotions.*” (pre-test)

P8: “*...but sometimes I try to avoid conflicts and then it is more difficult to explain myself*” (post-test)

P8: “*I try my best to actively listen to others but it depends on my ability to concentrate at that moment*” (follow-up)

Interestingly, fewer participants reflected on themselves in relation to communication competence compared to emotional awareness competence. However, it received the greatest number of responses within the theme named *reflection on the contextual factors*, which is to be expected given its connection with social context. Many respondents highlighted the influence of different social groups on their communication skills.

P4 writes that their ability to be aware of others' feelings is affected by some **different and less approachable people** (pre-test).

P5: "*my interpersonal communication depends on varied factors. formal, informal, family, friends, ...*" (post-test)

P7: "*I think that I'm very good at this, but my interpersonal skills are better when it is about my family. It is a bit more difficult to me with friends or external people, especially, the communication part...*" (pre-test)

Additionally, some individuals identified their profession as a contributing factor to their effective communication abilities.

P6: "*I worked as a (profession) before, so I am good at listening and understand other' emotion*" (pre-test)

P2 states that because of their (profession), they learned to be a good listener (post-test).

Interestingly, neither of these two participants reported to have a formal training in social-emotional learning. However, **P6** mentioned that it is expected in their job to attend to others' social-emotional skills. This again reinforces the idea that formal training or lack of it does not automatically translate into social-emotional competences of adults, and they could be attained through informal practices and professional development.

Another prominent sub-theme within this theme was how participants' own culture and cultural differences influence communication. For example, **P2** finds the international context being challenging and sometimes experiences misunderstandings with others due to cultural differences, as was stated in the follow-up. This idea is also echoed in **P6**'s follow-up response: "*I sometimes have difficulties communicating with others because of the cultural differences in international communities.*" Two factors could potentially influence this: the international

environment they are in and the focus of the intervention on communication in multicultural setting. Similarly, Popov and colleagues (2012) identified in their research that different cultural approaches to communication create difficulties in teamwork. The ability to understand each other's behaviour and what to expect in particular situations could aid teamwork (Popov et al., 2012), and this was attempted in the intervention through open discussion and exchange of cultural ideas. However, this approach requires a high level of self-awareness and reflection from participants. Further research is required to ascertain the extent to which the exchange of cultural information can assist in navigating communication challenges.

The fourth theme (*Suggesting strategies supporting the competence*) was not prominent for responses about communication competence. While intervention proposed some strategies to support communication, participants did not describe any strategies mentioned. Only one participant, **P5**, described strategies from their own experience: "***Finding similarity, respect to differences, and accept the diversity help me to communicate to others***" in their pre-test. This response demonstrates the participant's own reflection on potential strategies that could be beneficial in a multicultural environment.

4.3. Self-regulation

The final competence, self-regulation, was also addressed in the surveys in relation to the content of the intervention. The statements used in the surveys were as follows:

I know my motivations to do something, and I regulate my behaviour according to them

I am able to set clear goals for myself

I am able to use my emotions as cues to regulate my behaviour

It is notable that the mean overall score in the pre-test (M=4.1) appears to be lower compared to the other two competences, although it raised in the next surveys (M=4.6 in post-test, M=4.6 in post-test). However, this difference is not necessarily portrayed in the written responses.

A number of participants were able to state their goal-setting ability using *confident statements*. For instance, **P2** stated in the pre-test that they consider goals and values while self-regulating. Others predominantly described their confidence in goal setting in the post-test or follow-up.

As participants were reminded of goal-setting techniques during the session, it could facilitate their thinking about their goal-setting ability.

P5: *“the reason that I am here as an international student is related to my self-regulated skill to set goal ...”* (follow-up)

P8: *“Setting goals is easy...”* (post-test)

P9: *“I am able to set goals for myself, and have passion to achieve my goals”* (post-test)

Self-reflection on competence emerged once again as the most prevalent theme, with participants frequently reflecting on the individual aspects in relation to their own self-reflection skill.

While one participant did report that they had the ability to regulate their emotions in the pre-test (**P2**), some participants reflected on their ability to regulate their emotions in the pre-test and identified it as a challenge and a potential area for improvement (**P7, P8**).

P2 states their ability to manage their emotions and analyse their emotions (pre-test)

P7: *“I think sometimes my emotions dominate me and I need to work on that”* (pre-test)

P8: *“Even though I am aware of my emotions and what causes them I find it difficult to self-regulate at times”* (pre-test)

Notably, the challenge with emotion regulation appeared after the intervention for **P3**, while they were confident in the control of behaviour in relation to emotions. According to the theory of emotion regulation, both behavioural change and emotional suppression are considered to be part of the response modulation strategies (Gross, 2001). It is therefore unclear whether the participant anticipated a different approach to regulating their emotions when describing this aspect in the post-test, or whether their perception of their own abilities changed over the course of the study.

P3: *“Ability to control my behaviour depending on my emotions”* (pre-test)

P3: *“I still struggle to regulate my emotions sometimes. I get carried away with my emotions”* (post-test)

Some participants also recognised procrastination as their challenge in the context of self-regulation competence. A positive correlation was found between higher levels of procrastination and less autonomous forms of motivation (Senécal et al., 1995). Motivation was addressed in the intervention, but not in sufficient depth, as it was treated as one of the aspects of forethought in the self-regulation process. Given that procrastination is a common phenomenon in academic settings (Senécal et al., 1995), future SEL interventions should explicitly address this issue alongside instruction on self-regulation training.

P6: “... *procrastination sometimes happens. I would like to solve this problem*”

(follow-up)

P9: “*But I procrastinate sometimes...*” (post-test)

Reflection on contextual factors revealed two sub-themes: situational and cultural factors. Some participants acknowledged that pressure, stress and complex situations impact their self-regulation. Research has demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of self-regulation tend to experience lower stress factors (de la Fuente et al., 2020). Another study, addressing the inverse relationship, has indicated that the manner in which stress and pressure are perceived by an individual can influence self-regulation in a positive or negative manner (Mitchell et al., 2019). Further research on the relationship between stress and self-regulation in the context of interventions and training programmes could be beneficial, given its relevance for university students.

P4 describes that pressure and tensions affect their ability to regulate emotions

(follow-up)

P5: “*In simple situation I can manage feelings, ... **But in complex or undesirable condition** I need time to know what has happened and what can I do now...*” (post-test)

P8: “*Self-regulation is something that I find difficult, **especially under stress***”

(follow-up)

Others highlighted how they adapt their behaviour based on cultural cues in situations where they interact with others. **P2** regulates themselves depending on culture, situation or other person’s personality, as evidenced in their response in the post-test. However, in a subsequent survey, they acknowledged the potential for challenges in the international context, mentioning

the possibility of misunderstandings. This shift in their responses may be attributed to their prolonged exposure to a multicultural environment, given that the surveys were collected after a two-month interval. On the contrary, **P8** states “*I understood the cultural differences and how to adapt my behaviour in certain situations*” in the follow-up. This confirms the need to treat each participant as a separate case, given the differences observed.

While participants did not describe their personal *strategies* for self-regulation following the intervention, some explicitly stated that some intervention content was useful for them.

P2 found time management content being useful for them in the follow up.

P8: “*All the self-regulation tips were helpful especially in the beginning of my studies. I still use some methods*” (follow up)

Nevertheless, it is challenging to determine which specific content was perceived as more beneficial from the above-mentioned responses, as the participants were presented with a selection of theoretical perspectives in the format of learning material.

4.4. Summary of findings

Although the impact of the current intervention may be challenging to identify with certainty, a number of topics were identified through qualitative analysis that could be addressed through more focused research. The current section will provide a summary of these topics from the data presented in Table 7. Confident aspects refer to the areas where participants expressed certainty in their own competences; on the other hand, challenges were the areas participants identified for further improvement. Future interventions at the higher education level could focus on addressing the aforementioned challenges and providing content that targets these challenges. Contextual factors were derived from participants’ reflections and could be further investigated from perspectives other than students. A relatively small number of participants proposed strategies related to the development of competencies. Some participants referred to the content of the intervention, such as the use of a reflection diary or time management techniques. Other participants suggested their own strategies, including discussing emotions, finding similarities and respecting differences.

Moreover, while some participants described confidence in certain aspects, others encountered challenges in the same areas. This is not uncommon in diverse contexts, particularly in international ones, where individuals have received varying levels of exposure to social-emotional learning and are developing their skills in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study relies on self-report of the participants, which may not accurately reflect their actual competence in their responses. Consequently, it is necessary to conduct a pre-assessment of the participants' competences and the needs of the group in order to design and implement SEL programmes in a more effective manner.

Table 7. Summary of topics from the participants' thinking and reflections

	Theme 1: Confident statements	Theme 2: Self-reflection on competence	Theme 3: Reflection on the contextual factors	Theme 4: Suggesting strategies supporting the competence
	Confident aspects	Challenges	Contextual factors	Strategies
Emotional awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of own emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using words to describe emotions • Reflection on emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex and emotional situations (<i>"I am hurt..."</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective diary • Discussing emotions
Interpersonal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict management • Concentration during active listening • Understanding emotions of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social context • Professional development • Cultural differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Finding similarity, respect to difference, accept the diversity"</i> in multicultural context
Self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal setting • Emotion regulation* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotion regulation* • Procrastination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure, stress and complex situations • Cultural differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time management from the intervention content

Note. *While some participants were confident in their emotion regulation, some found it challenging, thus, this topic is mentioned in both aspects

Nevertheless, further social-emotional interventions could specifically address challenges which participants described. While some of these challenges were addressed in the intervention context, such as reflection of emotions or conflict management, the short-term nature and lack of space for practice could affect the participants confidence in these skills.

Various contextual factors add a level of complexity to the competence development. Research wants to specifically highlight how participants identified cultural differences as affecting their communication and self-regulation strategies in interaction with others. Further

research can explicitly address it in international context research. Although participants did not describe which elements of the current intervention were particularly beneficial for their communication or self-regulation competences, the reflection diary was described as a valuable tool for emotional awareness development and could be explored further.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed to explore students' thinking and reflection, with the objective of contributing to the field by integrating the international context with the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) in higher education. In addition, the study aimed to inform future SEL programmes in the similar contexts. Building on previous research, the present study highlighted that cultural differences in the multicultural context affect interpersonal communication and self-regulation, as described by participants. As culture encompasses a set of thoughts, patterns, and behaviours of individuals (Hecht & Shin, 2016), it affects self-awareness (English & Chen, 2007), communication norms and values (Behfar et al., 2006), and emotional expression and regulation (Matsumoto et al., 2008). The challenges inherent to diverse multicultural environments necessitate attention within the context of SEL studies by integrating culturally relevant pedagogy which meets the needs of the international student group and uses the diversity as an asset which supports the development of social-emotional competences (Yeh et al., 2021). Some participants indicated that they modify their behaviour in response to the culture of others they interact with. Consequently, developing cultural awareness together with social-emotional competences is advised. Reflecting on one's own and others' cultural perspectives in relation to interaction can facilitate navigation of multicultural situations.

One of the main outcomes of the intervention was a summary of the areas in which participants exhibited confidence and the areas in which they encountered challenges. For instance, some participants showed confidence in their ability to regulate emotions, while others struggled in this area. Cultural contexts can influence the manner in which individuals discuss their abilities and skills. In contrast to collectivistic cultures, which tend to exhibit a more malleable self-concept that is influenced by the environment, individualistic cultures are more likely to have a stable self-concept (English & Chen, 2007). While considering that the study relies on self-report data, it is worth noting that this variation is typical of multicultural settings, where individuals have developed their skills within different cultural contexts. Jørgensen and Brogaard (2021) argue that differentiation of teaching should be considered in diverse higher education settings, with knowledge about students' prior competence, interests and needs used to support instruction. While overall self-reported prior knowledge in this study did not reflect in participants' self-reports of their competencies, differences in needs and challenges were

present in the data. The study recommends the utilisation of pre-instructional data collection and pre-assessment of competences prior to the implementation of SEL practices.

The intervention appeared to foster awareness and reflection on social-emotional competences. Participants particularly exhibited awareness of communication-related aspects after the intervention, including the use of emotional awareness in communication situations and active empathetic listening. This finding aligns with Nes and colleagues (2022), who observed that participants demonstrated a high level of self-awareness, awareness of others, and environmental awareness following the implementation of a communication-oriented curriculum. Furthermore, the intervention likely facilitated participants' reflection, enabling them to identify challenges related to all three social-emotional competences and the contextual factors influencing them. Similarly, Mäkinen and colleagues (2021) noted that students faced challenges in applying classroom knowledge to daily situations. This phenomenon was also observed in the current intervention, where, despite the inclusion of conflict management content, one participant did not alter their perception of it as a challenging topic. However, Kotsou and colleagues (2019) summarised that developing social-emotional competences takes time, with effects often appearing only six months post-intervention. Therefore, it was not possible in this study to observe longitudinal results which could be addressed in further research.

The reflective diary, which was suggested to facilitate emotional awareness, was identified by multiple participants as a potentially beneficial tool, even though the precise mechanism of its influence is not described in the data. While diaries or journals reflecting on emotions and situations are often employed in therapy (Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), their implementation in an educational environment requires further investigation. Moreover, participants, who had prior interest or experience with the emotional awareness competence, proposed the use of discussions as a means of fostering this competence. Similarly, other studies found that discussing own feelings and listening to the feelings of others supports general emotional competence (Abe et al., 2013; Austin et al., 2007). As the cognitive-developmental theory of emotional awareness emphasizes conscious cognitive reflection on emotions (Lane and Smith, 2021), using written and verbal reflections can aid its development. Providing the emotional vocabulary such as hierarchical emotion words list (Shaver et al. (1987) could help in this process as it was identified by some participants.

In summary, the researcher argues that the implementation of SEL programmes should extend beyond the school level to higher education institutions. This is particularly relevant in the context of international programmes, where students face unique challenges in adapting to new systems and contexts and navigating cultural differences. The data showed that adult participants continued to find certain aspects of the core competences challenging, underlining the continuing need for their development. However, it is worth noting that adults' social-emotional competences could be acquired through informal learning and professional development, as some participants reported. Therefore, targeting specific aspects such as conflict management, difficult emotional situations or procrastination might lead to richer results.

Nevertheless, when understanding the findings of the study, it is necessary to consider certain limitations. These include a reliance on self-reported data, untargeted data collection methods, and the superficial treatment of the international context. It is important to note that the study only utilised self-reported data, which may not provide an objective vision of the participants' competences. The aspect of social desirability, which is the tendency of participants to deny undesirable traits and to report things in a favourable manner (Nederhof, 1985), should be considered when reflecting on findings. This particularly affects the confident statements in the participants' responses, which may not necessarily reflect the reality of things. As an example, in a study conducted by Marteau et al. (1991), it was observed that while students exhibited confidence in their ability to communicate effectively, this did not necessarily translate into actual competence. Further research could combine existing competence evaluation scales with qualitative results will help to achieve more accurate results.

Furthermore, while a variety of data was collected, the data collection methods could have been more focused on addressing the research question. Participants reported the survey structure as lengthy, and although it collected a variety of data, the responses to open-ended questions were rather short. The researcher also acknowledges that the use of quantitative instruments could better support qualitative results. However, the smaller sample size did not allow for in-depth exploration of the quantitative data, and these could be better planned in alignment with the research aims. Consequently, a more targeted approach at the outset could have produced more insightful results.

Finally, the study's treatment of the international context in the intervention content may be considered superficial. The intervention ambitiously attempted to cover many different aspects of the three core competences and multicultural aspect, resulting in only a brief coverage of some of them. Future studies could explore this further by identifying the relationship between SEL and the international context, implementing instruments that specifically address this relationship, and targeting it more comprehensively in the content.

AI was used to support the writing process, specifically for proofreading and language editing. No personal data was disclosed to it, and it was not used to generate ideas or interpretations.

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Zimmerman, B. J. (2013). From Cognitive Modeling to Self-Regulation: A Social Cognitive Career Path. *Educational Psychologist*, 48(3), 135–147.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2013.794676>

Appendices

Appendix A. Pre-test survey

Thank you for participating in the Social-Emotional Learning Intervention!

The research was created as a part of Master's Thesis and aims to explore the change of student's perception of their social-emotional skills over the course of intervention in the university setting.

This survey is designed to gather information about your prior knowledge of Social-Emotional Learning and a perception of the social-emotional skills.

The estimated time of completion is 15-20 minutes.

The research data is strictly confidential and is securely stored. Names will be collected and used by the researcher and replaced by the ID numbers. All other possible identifiers will be deleted from the data set. For more information refer to the Privacy Notice: ([link](#))

1. I voluntarily agree to participate and give my consent to provide my anonymous responses for use in this research *

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

2. Please mention your name.*

This information will only be used by the researcher to assign an ID number across the various data collection methods and will be deleted from the data immediately. If you are uncomfortable, please choose a nickname, but make sure you use the same nickname across all the further surveys and in the learning diary.

Name: [text field]

3. What is your native language? *

- English
- Other than English

4. Are you comfortable to use English to express your feelings and thoughts? *

- Comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Neutral
- Somewhat uncomfortable

Uncomfortable

5. Did you know about the concept of Social-Emotional Learning before participating in the intervention? *

Yes

No

6. How well do you know the concept of Social Emotional Learning? *

No knowledge (1) ————— Expert knowledge (6)

7. Have you had any previous working experience, education or training related to Social-Emotional Learning? Please describe those experiences.

[long response]

8. Please explain the concept of Social-Emotional Learning in your own words. *

[long response]

Emotional Awareness

You will be given statements related to your emotional awareness skill. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

9. I am able to consciously identify my emotions *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

10. I am able to describe my emotions with words *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

11. I am able to reflect on my emotions and recognise my thoughts and behaviours related to my emotions *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

12. How would you rate your overall emotional awareness skill? *

Emotional awareness is an ability of individual to consciously identify, describe and reflect on own emotions and feelings.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

13. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

Interpersonal communication skills

You will be given statements related to your interpersonal communication skills. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

14. I am able to be attentive and listen to others actively *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

15. I am aware of other's emotions when I interact with them *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

16. I am able to solve situations related to challenging communication such as conflicts or giving constructive feedback *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

17. How would you rate your interpersonal communication skill? *

Interpersonal communication skill is an ability of individual to actively listen and effectively communicate own thoughts, emotions and/or ideas to others in order to achieve mutual understanding.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

18. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

Self-regulation skill

You will be given statements related to your self-regulation skill. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

19. I know my motivations to do something and I regulate my behaviour according to them *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

20. I am able to set clear goals for myself *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

21. I am able to use my emotions as cues to regulate my behaviour *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

22. How would you rate your self-regulation skill? *

Self-regulation is an ability of individual to manage emotions, thought and behaviours according to own motivations, values, and goals.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

23. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

In the following section, you are given a scenario to reflect on. Please imagine yourself in the situation, and respond from that viewpoint, capturing your emotions and thoughts in your answers.

You were assigned a group project with three of your classmates. When you start working on it together, the disagreement about chosen research methodology between you and one of your groupmates arises. You argue about it and cannot come to any conclusion. The project is not moving forward until your group decides on the methodology. You should submit your project by the deadline as it is a part of a mandatory course.

24. What do you feel in this situation? *

[long response]

25. What do you think is needed from you to continue the project? *

[long response]

26. How would you communicate with others in this situation? *

[long response]

Appendix B. Reflection diary structure

Date	Name emotions you feel <i>What do you feel?</i>	Reflect on the situation <i>What situation caused this emotion?</i>	Behaviors or actions this emotion caused <i>How did you act in this situation?</i>	Describe your thoughts <i>What are your thoughts connected to the emotion?</i>

Appendix C. In-class survey 1

Thank you for participating in the Social-Emotional Learning Intervention!

This survey is the second part of data collection for the Master's Thesis. It is designed to gather information about your experiences, reflections and opinions after the Communication workshop.

The estimated time of completion is 20-25 minutes.

The research data is strictly confidential and is securely stored. Names will be collected and used by the researcher and replaced by the ID numbers. All other possible identifiers will be deleted from the data set. For more information refer to the Privacy Notice: ([link](#))

1. I voluntarily agree to participate and give my consent to provide my anonymous responses for use in this research *

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

2. Please mention your name.*

This information will only be used by the researcher to assign an ID number across the various data collection methods and will be deleted from the data immediately. If you are uncomfortable, please choose a nickname, but make sure you use the same nickname across all the further surveys and in the learning diary.

Name: [text field]

You will be given statements related to the discussions which happened during the workshop. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

3. I was able to connect emotional awareness to communication-related situations during the group discussion (emotional awareness in communication) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

4. I was able to contribute to the groups discussion with my thoughts and opinions (emotional awareness in communication) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

5. What did you learn from the participation in the group discussion (emotional awareness in communication)? *

[long response]

6. Did you face any challenges while participating in the group discussion (emotional awareness in communication)? Please share them if you did.

[long response]

7. I was aware of my own emotions during the pair discussion (cultural discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) _____ Completely agree (6)

8. I was aware of my pair's emotions during the pair discussion (cultural discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) _____ Completely agree (6)

9. I have been able to apply some principles of active listening in the discussion with my pair (cultural discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) _____ Completely agree (6)

10. What did you learn from the participation in the pair discussion (cultural discussion)? *

[long response]

11. Did you face any challenges while participating in the pair discussion (cultural discussion)? Please share them if you did.

[long response]

This section will ask you general questions related to the Communication Workshop. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

12. I have learned something new in the workshop *

Completely disagree (1) _____ Completely agree (6)

13. I understand the concept of active listening *

Completely disagree (1) _____ Completely agree (6)

14. I am now aware about cultural differences which might affect communication *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

15. I am able to identify different challenging situations which might affect communication *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

16. I am now aware of the strategies which can be used in challenging situations *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

17. I understand the principles of the effective feedback giving *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

In the following section, your task is to give a constructive feedback for the workshop. You are expected to share your thoughts on the class's format, structure and content, and provide suggestions for improvement.

While writing your feedback, please apply the principles you learned in the class.

Consider this exercise as a practice of discussed knowledge and skills, as your feedback will be received without evaluation or criticism.

18. Please provide your constructive feedback for the workshop *

[long response]

Appendix D. Learning Material

Goal Setting

Challenging and specific goals lead to higher task performance.

Goal content

- Needs to be specific (for example, "finish this essay" – vague; "write a 10-page essay on the topic X in three weeks while working 2 days a week" – specific)

Goal Intensity

- Needs to be challenging for a person with a consideration of individual abilities
- Commitment to the goal affects its realisation (Latham & Locke, 1991)

Motivation

Intrinsic motivation – guided by interest and pleasure, with no necessity of rewards and/or constraints.

Extrinsic motivation – driven by some external factors and consequences.

- Intrinsic motivation is correlated with positive outcomes, as well as with satisfaction and autonomy. (Deci et al., 1991)
- High self-motivation is connected to proactivity, initiative and persistence in goal setting and task analysis (Zimmerman, 2013)

Task Planning

Goals are achieved through applying planning and task strategies. Finding correct strategy requires experience and efforts (Latham & Locke, 1991)

Each bigger task needs to be divided into **specific key components** (Zimmerman, 2013)

For example:
Write a 10 page essay...

- Study requirements of the class
- Brainstorm possible interesting topics
- Select a topic for the essay
- Read relevant literature to the topic
- Choose one article with the core theory
- Find three articles with empirical evidence
- etc...

Forethought Phase: Task Analysis, Self-motivation, Beliefs, Values

```

    graph TD
      A[Forethought Phase: Task Analysis, Self-motivation, Beliefs, Values] --> B[Self-Reflection Phase: Self-judgement, Self-reaction]
      A --> C[Performance Phase: Self-control, Self-observation]
      B --> C
    
```

Adapted from: Zimmerman, B. J. (2013). From Cognitive Modeling to Self-Regulation: A Social Cognitive Career Path. *Educational Psychologist*, 48(3), 135-147.

Self-judgement

Self-evaluations of performance based on the initial goals achievement or failure. Finding causal relationships and reflecting on the effective strategies (Zimmerman, 2013)

Self-reflection Phase:

Self-judgement
Self-reaction

Performance Phase:

Self-control
Self-observation

(Gross & Thompson, 2007)

Self-reaction

Emotional assessment on the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the performance. Effective strategy involves adaptation of effective strategies and modifying ineffective ones. (Zimmerman, 2013)

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- Zimmerman, B. J. (2013). From Cognitive Modeling to Self-Regulation: A Social Cognitive Career Path. *Educational Psychologist*, 48(3), 135-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2013.794676>

Emotional Regulation

Emotions can be seen as a *signal* to access own progress and act accordingly. (Inzlicht et al., 2021)

ER Strategies:

- Situation Selection** – taking actions to choose suitable situation using prediction
- Situation Modification** – "intervention" inside the situation
- Attentional Deployment** – physical or internal redirection of attention
- Cognitive Change** – change how we assess situation
- Response Modulation** – regulate expression of emotion, e.g. meditate, problem-solving, reflect

Resource Management

To consider:

- academic resources (books, articles, data)
- time management (per task, checkpoints, deadlines)
- human resources (advice, help, feedback, meetings)

Time Management Tools:

- Gantt Chart
- Pomodoro Technique
- Kanban board
- Eisenhower Matrix

Appendix E. In-class survey 2

Thank you for participating in the Social-Emotional Learning Intervention!

This survey is the third part of data collection for the Master's Thesis. It is designed to gather information about your experiences, reflections and opinions after the Self-Regulation workshop.

The estimated time of completion is 20-25 minutes.

The research data is strictly confidential and is securely stored. Names will be collected and used by the researcher and replaced by the ID numbers. All other possible identifiers will be deleted from the data set. For more information refer to the Privacy Notice: ([link](#))

1. I voluntarily agree to participate and give my consent to provide my anonymous responses for use in this research *

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

2. Please mention your name.*

This information will only be used by the researcher to assign an ID number across the various data collection methods and will be deleted from the data immediately. If you are uncomfortable, please choose a nickname, but make sure you use the same nickname across all the further surveys and in the learning diary.

Name: [text field]

You will be given statements related to the "self-regulation & emotional awareness" discussion which happened during the workshop. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

3. I was able to connect emotional awareness to self-regulation during the group discussion (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

4. I was able to recall and describe context(s) in which I self-regulate (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

5. I was able to reflect on the various strategies I usually use to self-regulate (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

6. I was able to identify common self-regulation strategies in my culture (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

7. I was able to contribute to the group discussion with my thoughts and opinions (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

8. What did you learn from the participation in the group discussion (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion)*

[long response]

9. Did you face any challenges while participating in the group discussion? Please share them if you did. (self-regulation and emotional awareness discussion)

[long response]

In this section, you will be given statements related to the "Project Planning exercise" which happened during the workshop. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

10. I have learned something new in the workshop *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

11. I am now aware about different phases of self-regulation (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

12. I am now aware of the strategies which can be used to self-regulate in project management process (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

13. I understand the principles of the effective goal setting (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

14. I understand the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

15. I was able to reflect on my own goals and motivations connected to the project (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

16. I have learned how to effectively plan tasks based on the goals (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

17. I have learned how to regulate my emotions (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

18. I am now aware about various resources involved in project management (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

19. I was able to connect above mentioned theories to the project planning (project planning exercise) *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

20. Summarize your experience during Project Planning exercise

What have you learned from the exercise?

What challenges occurred during the exercise?

Was the exercise useful for your future learning and experiences?

[long response]

Appendix F. Post-test survey

Thank you for participating in the Social-Emotional Learning Intervention!

The research was created as a part of Master's Thesis and aims to explore the change of student's perception of their social-emotional skills over the course of intervention in the university setting.

This survey is designed to gather information about a perception of the social-emotional skills after the completion of Social-Emotional Learning Intervention.

The estimated time of completion is 15-20 minutes.

The research data is strictly confidential and is securely stored. Names will be collected and used by the researcher and replaced by the ID numbers. All other possible identifiers will be deleted from the data set. For more information refer to the Privacy Notice: ([link](#))

1. I voluntarily agree to participate and give my consent to provide my anonymous responses for use in this research *

Yes, I consent

No, I do not consent

2. Please mention your name.*

This information will only be used by the researcher to assign an ID number across the various data collection methods and will be deleted from the data immediately. If you are uncomfortable, please choose a nickname, but make sure you use the same nickname across all the further surveys and in the learning diary.

Name: [text field]

No knowledge or skill evaluation will be made based on the survey answers. Data will only be used for research purposes.

3. How well do you know the concept of Social Emotional Learning after the participating in the Intervention? *

No knowledge (1) ————— Expert knowledge (6)

4. Please explain the concept of Social-Emotional Learning in your own words. *

The explanation can be as simple as you want. The primary focus is on your personal understanding of SEL, not on the writing style or precise knowledge of definition.

[long response]

Emotional Awareness

You will be given statements related to your emotional awareness skill. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

5. I am able to consciously identify my emotions *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

6. I am able to describe my emotions with words *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

7. I am able to reflect on my emotions and recognise my thoughts and behaviours related to my emotions *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

8. How would you rate your overall emotional awareness skill? *

Emotional awareness is an ability of individual to consciously identify, describe and reflect on own emotions and feelings.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

9. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

Interpersonal communication skills

You will be given statements related to your interpersonal communication skills. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

10. I am able to be attentive and listen to others actively *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

11. I am aware of other's emotions when I interact with them *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

12. I am able to solve situations related to challenging communication such as conflicts or giving constructive feedback *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

13. How would you rate your interpersonal communication skill? *

Interpersonal communication skill is an ability of individual to actively listen and effectively communicate own thoughts, emotions and/or ideas to others in order to achieve mutual understanding.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

14. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

Self-regulation skill

You will be given statements related to your self-regulation skill. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

15. I know my motivations to do something and I regulate my behaviour according to them *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

16. I am able to set clear goals for myself *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

17. I am able to use my emotiona as cueas to regulate my behaviour *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

18. How would you rate your self-regulation skill? *

Self-regulation is an ability of individual to manage emotions, thought and behaviours according to own motivations, values, and goals.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

19. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

You will be given statements related to the use of SEL content covered in the course. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

20. I use the knowledge and skills from the emotional awareness class in my daily life*

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

21. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What knowledge and skills do you use? In what contexts? How often?

[long response]

22. I use the knowledge and skills from the communication workshop in my daily life*

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

23. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What knowledge and skills do you use? In what contexts? How often?

24. I use the knowledge and skills from the self-regulation workshop in my daily life*

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

25. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What knowledge and skills do you use? In what contexts? How often?

The following session will ask you about the use of reflection diary during the intervention and after its completion.

26. What tools have you used while identifying emotions in the reflection diary? *

Select all relevant

Emotion wheel

Emotion Words list

Bodily Map of Emotions

None of the above

27. Did you find the reflection diary useful for the development of your emotional awareness skill?*

Not useful at all (1) ————— Extremely useful (6)

28. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

In what ways was it useful or not useful for you?

29. Did you use reflection diary (in the same or similar format) after the intervention *

Yes

No

30. How often did you use reflection diary (in the same or similar format) after the intervention? *

Every day

3-4 times a week

1-2 times a week

2-4 times a month

Once a month

In the following section, you are given a scenario to reflect on. Please imagine yourself in the situation, and respond from that viewpoint, capturing your emotions and thoughts in your answers.

You were assigned a group project with three of your classmates. When you start working on it together, the disagreement about chosen research methodology between you and one of your groupmates arises. You argue about it and cannot come to any conclusion. The project is not moving forward until your group decides on the methodology. You should submit your project by the deadline as it is a part of a mandatory course.

31. What do you feel in this situation? *

[long response]

32. What do you think is needed from you to continue the project? *

[long response]

33. How would you communicate with others in this situation? *

[long response]

Appendix G. Follow-up survey

Thank you for participating in the Social-Emotional Learning Intervention!

The research was created as a part of Master's Thesis and aims to explore the change of student's perception of their social-emotional skills over the course of intervention in the university setting.

This survey is designed to gather information about a perception of the social-emotional skills after the completion of Social-Emotional Learning Intervention.

The estimated time of completion is 15-20 minutes.

The research data is strictly confidential and is securely stored. Names will be collected and used by the researcher and replaced by the ID numbers. All other possible identifiers will be deleted from the data set. For more information refer to the Privacy Notice: [\(link\)](#)

1. I voluntarily agree to participate and give my consent to provide my anonymous responses for use in this research *

Yes, I consent

No, I do not consent

2. Please mention your name.*

This information will only be used by the researcher to assign an ID number across the various data collection methods and will be deleted from the data immediately. If you are uncomfortable, please choose a nickname, but make sure you use the same nickname across all the further surveys and in the learning diary.

Name: [text field]

Emotional Awareness

You will be given statements related to your emotional awareness skill. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

3. I am able to consciously identify my emotions *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

4. I am able to describe my emotions with words *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

5. I am able to reflect on my emotions and recognise my thoughts and behaviours related to my emotions *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

6. How would you rate your overall emotional awareness skill? *

Emotional awareness is an ability of individual to consciously identify, describe and reflect on own emotions and feelings.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

7. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

Interpersonal communication skills

You will be given statements related to your interpersonal communication skills. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

8. I am able to be attentive and listen to others actively *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

9. I am aware of other's emotions when I interact with them *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

10. I am able to solve situations related to challenging communication such as conflicts or giving constructive feedback *

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

11. How would you rate your interpersonal communication skill? *

Interpersonal communication skill is an ability of individual to actively listen and effectively communicate own thoughts, emotions and/or ideas to others in order to achieve mutual understanding.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

12. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

Self-regulation skill

You will be given statements related to your self-regulation skill. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

13. I know my motivations to do something and I regulate my behaviour according to them *
 Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

14. I am able to set clear goals for myself *
 Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

15. I am able to use my emotions as cues to regulate my behaviour *
 Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

16. How would you rate your self-regulation skill? *

Self-regulation is an ability of individual to manage emotions, thought and behaviours according to own motivations, values, and goals.

Low skill (1) ————— Proficient skill (6)

17. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What criteria have you applied to assess yourself in this manner?

[long response]

You will be given statements related to the use of SEL content covered in the course. Please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with them.

18. I use the knowledge and skills from the emotional awareness class in my daily life*

Content of the class:

What is emotion

Cultural Display Rules

Emotional Awareness

How to identify emotions

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

19. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What knowledge and skills do you use? In what contexts? How often?

[long response]

20. Did you use reflection diary (in the same or similar format) after the intervention *

Yes

No

21. How often did you use reflection diary (in the same or similar format) after the intervention? *

Every day

3-4 times a week

1-2 times a week

2-4 times a month

Once a month

22. I use the knowledge and skills from the communication workshop in my daily life *

Content of the class:

Active Empathetic Listening

Cultural norms in communication

Communication in challenging situations (Model of Strategic Conflict)

Giving Feedback (Honesty and Benevolence Model; I-messages)

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

23. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What knowledge and skills do you use? In what contexts? How often?

24. I use the knowledge and skills from the self-regulation workshop in my daily life *

Content of the class:

Project management, self-regulation model:

Goals, Motivation, Task Planning;

Emotional Regulation, Resource Management;

Self-judgement and Self-reaction

Completely disagree (1) ————— Completely agree (6)

25. Provide an explanation for your chosen score to the previous question *

What knowledge and skills do you use? In what contexts? How often?

[long response]

This the last set of questions in this survey. Please reflect on the effects of intervention on you and your daily life.

26. In what ways do you perceive the impact of the intervention on your emotional awareness?

[long response]

27. In what ways do you perceive the impact of the intervention on your communication skills?

[long response]

28. In what ways do you perceive the impact of the intervention on your self-regulation skills?

[long response]

29. Please summarise the impact of the intervention on your social-emotional skills in general

[long response]

Appendix H. Privacy Notice

Privacy Notice for Research Data

1. Data controller of the research

University of Turku, FI-20014 Turku, Finland

2. Parties involved in research conducted as a collaboration project and division of responsibilities

Almira Yausheva, alyaus@utu.fi - responsible researcher

Suvi Jokila + suvi.jokila@utu.fi - main research supervisor

Xiaoshan Huang + xiaoshan.x.huang@utu.fi - second research supervisor

3. Research project leader or responsible group

Almira Yausheva, alyaus@utu.fi

4. Contact information of the Data Protection Officer

Contact information of the Data Protection Officer at the University of Turku: dpo@utu.fi

5. Persons conducting research

Almira Yausheva, alyaus@utu.fi

6. Contact person in matters related to the research registry

Almira Yausheva, alyaus@utu.fi

7. Name of the research registry

Social-Emotional Learning Intervention

8. Purpose of processing personal data

The anonymised data will be used for the research purposes as a part of Master's thesis. The goal of the research is to observe the change of student's perception of their social-emotional skills, specifically emotional awareness, interpersonal communication skills, and self-regulation skills, over the course of intervention.

9. Legal basis for processing personal data

The legal basis for processing personal data is the Article 6 or Article 9 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

The EU General Data Protection Regulation, Article 6 Section 1 (select one basis for processing data for each usage):

consent of the data subject

compliance with the data controller's legal obligation

legislation:

task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller

scientific of historic research or statistical purposes

archiving research or cultural heritage materials

legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party

which legitimate interest:

Article 9 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (special categories of personal data):

consent of the data subject

archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes

10. What categories of personal data the research data includes

Names will be collected from the participants to match the multiple sources of data among themselves and will not be stored and replaced by numerical identifiers.

Participants can decide how much of their personal data they will express in the different data gatherings, this may include experiences, feelings, and views. Background information such as native language and language preferences might be collected.

11. Which sources the personal data is collected from

Primary data collection involves directly obtaining information from the participants through multiple questionnaires and reflection diaries.

12. Transfers or disclosures of data outside the research group

The data will not be shared outside of the research group.

13. Transfers or disclosures of data outside the EU or the European Economic Area

The data will not be transferred across the borders outside the EU or EEA.

14. Automated decision-making

The personal data will not be used for automated decision-making or profiling

15. Principles of safeguarding personal data

The data is confidential

Basis of confidentiality: It is stored in a secure university online cloud, Seafire.

Safeguarding manual data: Transferred to the digital data and stores at online

The data processed in the information systems is safeguarded with the following measures:

account credentials **password** registering usage access control

other measure, what:

Processing direct identifiers:

Direct identifiers are erased during anonymisation of data

The data is analysed including the direct identifiers, because (basis for keeping the direct identifiers):

16. Processing of personal data after the research has ended

The research register is disposed of

The research register is archived without identifiers with identifiers

Where is the data archived in, and for how long: University online cloud, Seafire, 2 years

17. Rights of the data subjects and possible limitations to them

The data subject has a right to cancel the consent they have given if the processing of personal data is based on consent.

The data subject has the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority if the data subject considers that the processing of personal data related to him/her has violated the information security legislation currently valid.

The rights of the data subject under the GDPR can be deviated from in scientific research with the following safety measures:

- The processing of personal data is based on the research plan.
- The research has an appointed person or a group responsible for it.
- The personal data is used and disclosed only for historic or scientific research purposes or other comparable purposes, and other actions are also implemented in a manner ensuring that data identifying an certain person is not disclosed to outsiders.
- If the research includes processing of the personal data referred to in Article 9 Section 1 of the GDPR (special categories of personal data) and Article 10 (personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences), in addition to complying with sections 1—3 mentioned above, the persons conducting the research must also compile a data protection impact assessment as defined in Article 35 of the GDPR and deliver it to the Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman 30 days before the research is started.

The following rights of the data subject under the EU General Data Protection Regulation will be deviated from in this research for the following parts:

Select which rights of the data subject have been decided to be limited. In the text field, write down the justifications for why this is necessary.

- The data subject has the right to inspect their registered data (Article 15).
- The data subject has the right to rectification of their data.
- The data subject has the right to erasure of their data (Article 17). The right to erasure of data is not applied in scientific or historical research purposes in so far as the right to erasure is likely to render impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the objectives of that processing.
- The data subject has a right to restrict the processing of data (Article 18).
- The data subject has a right to object the processing of data (Article 21).

Appendix I. Consent form

Consent to participate in Social-Emotional Learning Intervention research

Purpose of Study:

The research project aims to observe the change of student's perception of their social-emotional skills, specifically emotional awareness, interpersonal communication skills, and self-regulation skills, over the course of intervention.

	<i>Please mark a box if you agree with the statement</i>
I confirm that I have read and understand the privacy notice for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point, without providing any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I will not be identifiable from any publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to use a reflection diary as a part of the research data analysis.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (<i>select one option</i>): a) I do not wish to be quoted.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>or</i> b) I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs if I am not identifiable.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I agree to participate in the research.

Name of participant

Contact email

Date,
dd /mm / yyyy

Signature

Almira Yausheva

Name of the person taking consent

Date,
dd /mm / yyyy

Signature

Appendix J. Themes table

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency		
		EA	IC	SR
Confident statements		8	8	8
Self-reflection in relation to skill	Own strength and/or weaknesses	5	6	11
	The need for improvement	3	1	3
Reflection on the contextual factors	Professional factors	0	2	0
	Cultural factors	0	4	3
	Social factors	1	4	0
	Situational factors	4	1	4
Suggesting strategies to support the skill	Strategies utilising intervention content	4	0	3
	Strategies outside of intervention content	3	1	0