Research Article

Toward an Asset-Based and Co-Learning Approach to Social-Emotional Learning: A Duo-Ethnographic Exploration

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Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has become increasingly recognized as a vital framework for addressing the holistic well-being of multilingual learners (MLLs) in diverse English language teaching settings. However, existing theories of SEL often view MLLs through a deficit-based lens, failing to acknowledge and build upon their rich sociocultural assets. This deficit perspective tends to stem from a narrow understanding of emotions as obstacles to learning, reinforcing normative behavioral expectations. Despite SEL's transformative potential, it can sometimes perpetuate a false dichotomy between emotion and reason, thus limiting the integration of emotions as a fundamental part of the learning process. In this duo-ethnographic exploration, two non-native English-speaking TESOL professionals critically examined and engaged in the theoretical constructs within the SEL framework through the lens of their full-circle journeys as both former MLLs and English language teaching (ELT) educators. Our investigation revealed that emotions, far from being barriers, are powerful and often untapped resources for intellectual growth and social change, fueling passion and determination. Thus, we advocate for an asset-based, co-learning approach to SEL that recognizes and harnesses the value of emotions as central to the learning process. The implications of this approach for classroom practice are also discussed

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a crucial paradigm for addressing social justice in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), permeating classroom practices, teacher training, trauma programs, and scholarly discourse (Pentón Herrera & Martinez-Alba, 2020; Hoffman, 2009). This development is evident in the plethora of literature and resources, such as recent works by Pentón Herrera (2020), Li et al. (2023), and Weissberg and Cascarino (2013), alongside the influx of articles addressing SEL in the field of ELT during and after COVID-19 (Jagers et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Leonard & Woodland, 2022). The anticipated advantage of implementing SEL into school curricula is to help marginalized youth, especially those from marginalized communities, become socially and emotionally "competent" (Hoffman, 2009, p. 533), thereby leading to their academic success (Denham & Brown,

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2010). Similarly, SEL in the English language classroom is perceived to foster multilingual learners' (MLLs) growth, self-care, and independence (Pentón Herrera & Martinez-Alba, 2020).

Studies (e.g., Camangian & Cariaga, 2022; Drake & Oglesby, 2020; Eklund et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2009; Jagers et al., 2021) have highlighted critical concerns regarding the deficit-based foundations of SEL. For example, Hoffman (2009) argued that dominant approaches to SEL such as CASEL (2020) often fail to address the political and cultural assumptions embedded within SEL, neglecting the complex sociopolitical contexts that shape our diverse educational landscapes. Despite the passage of time since these studies, their warnings remain pertinent and pressing.

Given the significant influence of SEL in ELT and its potential to promote equity for MLLs, particularly those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds in the Global South, our study advocates for an asset-based approach to counter the prevailing deficit-oriented perspectives in SEL. This approach is particularly crucial in today's evolving and complex educational environments. While numerous studies have focused on SEL over the past decades, few have explored asset-based approaches, as indicated by our research on platforms such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and ResearchGate.

To address this gap, we, two multilingual TESOL professionals, utilize a duo-ethnographic method, examining our emotional journeys through the complexities of diverse educational settings in the U.S. Our goal is to challenge the prevailing deficit-oriented discourse on SEL and advocate for an asset-based perspective instead. Through our exploration, we aim to provide insights that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of SEL. Additionally, we offer practical recommendations for classroom practice based on our findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SEL: Overview and Critical Perspectives

SEL is a framework designed to help students develop essential skills for understanding and managing their emotions, building positive relationships, setting and achieving goals, and making responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). The term SEL was introduced in 1994 by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Borowski, 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2014). Over time, SEL has gained recognition as a crucial component for students' academic success and overall well-being.

Research has shown that SEL is correlated with improved academic performance, reduced behavioral issues, and a positive school climate (Borowski, 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2014). In the early 2000s, SEL began to be integrated into broader educational policies with schools and districts adopting SEL frameworks and embedding them within curricula, teaching practices, and school-wide initiatives (Weissberg & Cascarino,

2013). This period also saw a rise in professional development for educators focused on SEL (Murano et al., 2019; Waajid et al., 2013).

Despite the growing adoption of SEL and its recognition as a tool for fostering positive educational outcomes, its implementation has sparked debate. Critics have raised concerns about SEL's potential deficit-oriented perspective, particularly regarding issues of equity for socioeconomically disadvantaged MLLs. The following critiques outline key areas of concern.

2.1.1 Deficit-Oriented Underpinning

Hoffman (2009) highlighted the deficit-based perspective of SEL and argued that despite its rhetoric about supporting students' overall development, SEL in practice often frames students' emotions negatively rather than redirecting educators' attention to the relational contexts of classrooms and schools, and students' emotional resilience and resourcefulness in navigating the classroom environment. This critique remains relevant today, as Hoffman's concerns continue to resonate. Even in recent studies, such as the study by Bailey et al. (2019), the deficit perspective persists. Their work still emphasizes the importance of learners' self-regulation and adjustment to the classroom setting as foundational SEL skills, which are seen as prerequisites for the later development of more complex SEL competencies (Bailey et al., 2019).

2.1.2 Normative View of SEL

Beyond the deficit perspective, there is a prevalent tendency to treat emotions as a generalized, undifferentiated concept. This approach contributes to a negative view of emotion and reinforces a social control perspective (Camangian & Cariaga, 2022; Clark et al., 2022; Drake & Oglesby, 2020; Jagers et al., 2021). For instance, Clark, et al. (2022) demonstrated that as SEL becomes embedded in school policies, there is a move toward standardizing SEL and adopting a normative view of emotion. This is evident in the core competencies emphasized in many SEL curricula—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Temircan, 2022; Waajid et al., 2013).

Given the critique regarding the hegemonic and normative potential of SEL, it is crucial to adopt a critical approach to SEL. Such an approach should examine how SEL frameworks may perpetuate or intensify systemic oppressions faced by historically marginalized individuals in educational settings.

2.1.3 Dehumanized Approaches to SEL

SEL is frequently operationalized through concepts such as "grit" and a "growth mindset" (Park, et al., 2020, p.1) as well as related psychological constructs such as "executive functioning" (Temircan, 2022, p. 287). This approach to SEL promotes a narrow, hyper-individualistic, and mechanistic form of "character education" (Park et al., 2020, p.1) where social and emotional experiences are reduced to mere skills that can be developed or harnessed. By framing SEL in this way, the rich and nuanced nature of human emotions is diminished, leading to an understanding of emotional and social life that is overly simplified and disconnected from the complexities of the underlying socio-political conditions. This reductionist view denies the inherent, multifaceted nature of emotions and interactions, thereby overlooking the broader, relational aspects of human development and well-being.

Building on these critiques, it is essential to delve into the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of SEL. Moving beyond its current rhetoric, we need to adopt a more critical and nuanced approach to SEL. This approach should focus not only on students' academic achievement but also on equity and empowerment as central goals of SEL.

2.2 Toward an Asset-Based Approach to SEL

As two female transnational ELT teacher-scholars originally from the Global South and now practicing TESOL in US higher education, we appreciate the evolving recognition of SEL and its pivotal role within ELT. SEL has contributed to elevating awareness of the intrinsic connections between the emotional well-being of MLLs and their language development. This recognition, however, has also inspired us to further and complicate this discourse by offering nuanced perspectives drawn from our full-circle experiences transitioning from former MLLs to current non-native English-speaking teacher educators, in pursuit of a more equitable approach to SEL for MLLs. We aim to contextualize SEL within an asset-based framework (Arias, 2022; Hong, 2024), recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities presented by MLLs. Additionally, we seek to problematize the aspects of SEL theories and practices, highlighting areas where cultural nuances and diverse perspectives may intersect with SEL practices.

In this study, we define an asset-based approach to SEL as one that views emotions not just as integral to the language learning process, but as valuable assets that can drive explorations of social justice within language education and beyond, aligning with current studies on asset-based pedagogies (Arias, 2022; Hong, 2024). By recognizing and embracing emotions as essential components of students' learning experience, we aim to promote educational initiatives that foster meaningful engagement with a holistic understanding of multilingual learners' well-being and development, both within ELT and in broader societal contexts.

However, we observe that the existing literature on SEL often fails to incorporate an asset-based and nuanced perspective on emotion, particularly concerning MLLs. The majority of studies (e.g., Borowski, 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2014; Temircan, 2022) predominantly adopt a deficit-based viewpoint, which has come to shape the prevailing SEL paradigm. This deficit perspective tends to pathologize MLLs' emotional experiences rather than recognizing them as sources of strength and insight. Hence, we believe that addressing this gap is crucial for providing more comprehensive and holistic support for MLLs.

To broaden the scope of SEL and better empower MLLs, we turn to interdisciplinary perspectives beyond traditional SEL frameworks. By doing so, we aim to develop an asset-based approach that fully embraces the complex emotional landscapes of MLLs. In the following sections, we discuss some critical constructs that are foundational to asset-based approaches, setting the stage for a more inclusive and empowering SEL paradigm.

2.3 Challenging the Emotion and Reason Divide

As SEL gains traction in education, particularly within ELT, it is important to recognize that the exploration of emotions has a rich and complex history in the social sciences, especially within Western traditions. Feminist scholars like Nussbaum (1996) and Noddings (2012) have been at the forefront of challenging traditional dichotomies between reason and emotion. They argue that emotions should not be dismissed or strictly regulated but rather viewed as integral to a comprehensive understanding of reason and human experience.

Noddings (2012), in particular, critiqued the Enlightenment-era emphasis on reason as the supreme guiding principle in education, advocating instead for the inclusion of emotions as a vital component of the learning process. Noddings posited that social-emotional learning, both as a pedagogical approach and a social practice, is essential for cultivating meaningful and transformative educational experiences. Noddings emphasized the creation of supportive and caring environments in which students feel emotionally secure and valued, asserting that such conditions are fundamental for genuine learning to occur.

2.3.1 Emotion and Power

When discussing SEL's implications for multilingual learners, it is important to consider the historical contexts that have shaped the teaching of English as a globally dominant language. This teaching has often been linked to colonial legacies and assimilationist agendas, imposing normative expectations of rationality while marginalizing differences, emotions, and trauma. These elements have often been treated as disruptive

rather than as integral aspects of the learning experience (Drake & Oglesby, 2020; Jagers et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021).

Post-colonial theories refer to a body of scholarship that critically examines the effects of colonization on cultures, societies, and knowledge systems, while also seeking to dismantle the lasting legacies of colonialism (Sawant, 2012). These theories explore how the scars of the past can serve as fertile ground for the emergence of a new narrative— one that embraces the complexity of human emotion and acknowledges the resilience of those affected by colonialism. Examples can be found in Chicana activist and writer Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and philosopher Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968). They delve deeply into the intricate web of psychological trauma woven by the oppressive forces of Western Reason and colonialism.

Their works inspire and guide us through the labyrinth of colonization's dehumanizing effects, impacting both individual psyches and collective consciousness. At the core of their discourse lies a profound understanding of postcolonial psychology, wherein personal trauma serves as a lens through which the broader implications of colonization are illuminated. Through their writings, they unveil the transformative potential inherent in personal suffering, illustrating how the deepest wounds can yield the most vibrant hues of resilience and liberation (Chaudhary, 2012). Central to their works is the recognition of emotions, particularly "anger", "rage", and similar sentiments, as disruptive yet constructive forces capable of dismantling the veneer of hegemonic narratives. By exposing power dynamics and historical traumas, these emotions serve as tools for challenging the dominant discourse imposed upon colonized subjects.

2.3.2 Emotional Labor

While we embrace an asset-based approach to SEL, we recognize the importance of addressing power imbalances within school cultures and institutional settings. Often, minoritized students are encouraged to self-regulate their emotions to conform to normative behaviors or to suppress their emotions altogether. This can lead to a disproportionate burden of "emotional labor" for marginalized groups, who navigate societal expectations and workplace dynamics that may not fully respect their experiences and emotions.

Emotional labor, a concept introduced by sociologist Hochschild (1990), refers to managing one's emotions to present a desired facade in various situations or roles. This can involve regulating emotions to project a specific state, even when it contradicts one's true feelings, and includes tasks like maintaining a positive attitude under stress.

Numerous studies have highlighted the undue emotional labor experienced by marginalized individuals (Neal & Espinoza, 2023; Song, 2018). For instance, Neal and Espinoza (2023) found that racially minoritized educators, when addressing sensitive

topics such as race, are often expected to maintain composure, reflecting colorblind ideologies prevalent within institutions. This expectation unfairly burdens these educators with the responsibility of upholding the institution's image, thereby exposing inequitable power structures in our society. Similarly, Kocabaş-Gedik and Hart (2021) emphasize the dynamic and contextual nature of emotional labor, illustrating how marginalized individuals navigate emotional landscapes with flexibility and resourcefulness.

A comprehensive understanding of the emotional repertoire and resources of multilingual learners must consider the power dynamics and socio-political contexts in which they are situated. This perspective underscores how examining emotional labor can provide valuable insights into adopting an asset-based perspective on multilingual learners (Kocabaş-Gedik & Hart, 2021; Neal & Espinoza, 2023).

In light of the above literature review, we are committed to grounding our exploration of SEL in asset-based approaches. However, there is a limited body of research examining SEL through such a lens. Theoretical constructs as we have explored above can guide our investigation into asset-based approaches to SEL. To deepen our understanding of the rich emotional experiences of multilingual learners, we need to draw on individuals' rich narratives and autoethnographic methods, especially those from marginalized backgrounds.

Therefore, we aim to explore a more asset-based and nuanced approach to SEL through our autoethnographic exploration. By examining the complexities of our own emotions as multilingual TESOL professionals, we seek to uncover the underlying reasons behind those emotions, thereby revealing our resilience, strengths, and strategic insights. This approach will illuminate how SEL can be effectively utilized to empower MLLs and better address their needs.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Building upon the above literature review, our collaborative autoethnography delves into the following research questions:

1) How can an asset-based approach to SEL reveal the complexity of emotions, highlighting their role in shaping a rich inner life and the underlying narrative of "why"?

2) In what ways can an asset-based approach to SEL move beyond the neoliberal focus on soft skills and academic outcomes, to instead appreciate emotions as integral to human life—where they can act as forms of resistance, responses to social structures, and expressions of vulnerability that underscore our shared humanity?

3) How can an asset-based approach to SEL demonstrate the power of emotions as catalysts for social change, driving agency, voice, and social action?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Collaborative Autoethnography

In recent years, autoethnography has emerged as a promising approach, offering a pathway toward empathy and humility. Autoethnography leverages researchers' vulnerability to drive the inquiry (Aberasturi-Apraiz et al., 2020), allowing them to be the participants, and their experiences and emotional self-reflexivity to be the focus and the source for rich data (Chang, 2013; Ellis, 2004). It is critical, transformative, and contextually relevant.

Based on autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography (CAE), as defined, is "a qualitative research method in which researchers work in the community to collect their autobiographical materials and to analyze and interpret their data collectively to gain a meaningful understanding of sociocultural phenomena reflected in their autobiographical data" (Chang et al., 2013, pp. 23-24). CAE addresses researchers' unique contribution while advancing their understanding of a social phenomenon through collaboration. Through CAE, individual narratives converge to unveil a shared humanity amidst diverse experiences, fostering a dialogue that is essential for meaningful change. CAE enables researchers to be participants, collecting researchers' autoethnographic materials, analyzing and interpreting them in order to gain a meaningful understanding. The research process of CAE, on the other hand, is highly interactive; each individual's voice is closely examined within the group. CAE brings collective exploration of research subjectivity, it is power-sharing among researcher-participants in the efficient and enriched research process, yielding a deeper learning about ourselves for a community building (Chang et al., 2013).

As two non-native English-speaking Asian women, our journeys have been shaped by personal and professional struggles in the US. Our nuanced navigation of emotions presents a rich tapestry of knowledge and insight, especially valuable for MLLs who are from similar backgrounds. Autoethnography transcends mere self-study; it must be intertwined with critical analysis. In our study, we delve into our emotional life through a broader sociocultural lens, acknowledging the power dynamics inherent within the institutional structures and the sociocultural contexts in which we are situated. Our narratives begin with a brief overview of our respective journey leading up to a critical incident, followed by an exploration of the research questions.

4.2 Data Analysis

Through a combination of synchronous meetings and asynchronous collaboration, we have shared and explored our journeys within the TESOL field, delving into our emotional experiences and reflections. These shared narratives have become the foundational "data" for our subsequent analysis and reflection.

Our analytical process began with a collective review of the data, during which we identified potential themes and examined their connections to our research questions. This collaborative approach allowed us to apply a flexible yet rigorous coding process. We each color-coded the data based on research questions and iteratively uncovered sub-themes related to each research question. To ensure clarity and coherence, we held Zoom meetings to discuss and clarify our notes and coding. These discussions enabled us to hold each other accountable, enhance our understanding of the data, and identify underlying patterns that emerged from our analysis.

In the remainder of the methodology section, we present a summary of our individual autoethnographic explorations, highlighting the diverse and insightful reflections on our experiences within the TESOL field. We focus particularly on critical incidents that elicited significant emotional responses and experiences. These personal reflections provide a rich context for interpreting the findings related to our research questions.

In the ensuing sections, we present the findings, addressing the research questions, and then engage in a discussion that connects our findings to the existing literature. We also examine how our experiences inform and support an asset-based approach to SEL. Through this analysis, we aim to demonstrate how our insights contribute to a more nuanced and empowering approach to SEL for MLLs.

4.2.1 Ching-Ching's Story

The first author, Ching-Ching, hails from Taiwan and grew up in a middle-class family where her parents worked hard to save for their children's education. She came to the US as an international student to pursue graduate studies in philosophy. Being one of the few students from the Global South in a predominantly white program presented significant challenges. She faced language barriers, the need to adapt to a new culture, isolation, and the difficulty of engaging with a field where she saw little representation of her background in the curriculum. Despite these obstacles, this was not completely unexpected for her. She grew up admiring Western philosophers such as Kant, Heidegger, Foucault, and Lacan, viewing her journey to the US as a spiritual pilgrimage for personal growth. In Taiwan, she had studied Western philosophy often through translated texts, and now she felt privileged to engage with these ideas in their native context.

However, her subsequent experiences also contributed to an internalized sense of inferiority and self-doubt, a common issue for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Nevertheless, she decided not to dwell on this discourse any further in the current study, as these challenges are well-documented in relevant literature.

Fast forward to today, Ching-Ching is currently an instructor in TESOL and Bilingual programs, where she feels privileged to leverage her experiences and insights to contribute to the field. She has previously taught ESL at various grade levels. What she

wanted to focus on in this study is a critical incident she encountered a few years ago as an ESL professor at a suburban university in New York, where she was one of the few non-native English-speaking faculty members.

She still recalls her shock upon realizing that the majority of her students hailed from China, with only one student from Thailand and another from Taiwan. This revelation stood in stark contrast to her experience during her graduate studies in the philosophy department, where she was often one of the few Asian students and later one of the few non-native English-speaking teachers in her professional environments. Given her limited experience with ESL in the higher education setting, she had anticipated encountering a more diverse student body in her ESL classrooms, particularly at a university that prided itself on internationalization. This realization led her to understand that the institution approached ESL instruction in a remedial manner, integrating international students into the campus community in a way that felt segregated rather than inclusive.

Later, she comes to realize that the relatively homogenous student body in the ESL program is a consequence of the program being managed by a third-party, profit-driven company contracted by the university to increase the number of international students in their student populations. The program operates in an assembly-line fashion: students are placed according to their English proficiency, and at the end of each level, their proficiency is assessed to determine if they can progress to the next level and eventually enroll in their chosen programs.

Through her work in the higher education ESL program, Ching-Ching has become keenly aware of prevailing English language ideologies. This position also has given her new insights into how these dominant ideologies extend from P-12 education through higher education. Outside of ghettoized communities, she has rarely encountered such a high concentration of students from the same culturally and linguistically homogeneous background. This experience has highlighted the pervasive reach of the systemic nature of the dominant language ideologies in shaping students' academic trajectories and experience.

To cope with a homogeneous student body, Ching-Ching had to adjust her teaching approach. She had originally prepared to teach in a culturally and linguistically diverse environment, where she could leverage this diversity to motivate students to tap into their total language repertoire and learn from each other's cultures. However, the program's recruitment practices created an artificially homogeneous and secluded environment, making this approach difficult to implement and, at times, feel forced. In this less diverse setting, she struggled to effectively draw on students' varied cultural backgrounds and language skills for learning. Despite these challenges, the experience inspired her to collaborate with a history professor to create a more integrated and inclusive learning environment for her students. Their partnership eventually evolved into an edited book volume that successfully brought together themes of internationalization and diversity.

The deficit mindset toward MLLs permeates more than just the program's curriculum; it is also deeply embedded in its standardized assessment methods. At the end of the semester, her students were required to take the I-TEP to evaluate their English proficiency in four categories, and they had to achieve a certain score to advance to the next class. Although the program director claimed that instructors had the discretion to override these scores, the reality was different. The advancement policy was strictly enforced due to its high stakes, affecting student progression and carrying financial implications for the program.

Throughout her three semesters in the program, she encountered several borderline cases where students appealed their scores at the end of each term. Many of these students were only a few points short of the benchmark required for advancement. Despite evaluating their language development holistically and believing that some were ready to progress, her recommendations were consistently overridden by the program director. As the only Chinese instructor in the program, she felt a profound sense of powerlessness, unable to effectively advocate for her students.

A critical incident occurred when Ching-Ching appealed for a student who was only one point below the benchmark. When the program director reiterated the same argument, citing scientific research, Ching-Ching couldn't contain her frustration. "Of course, you'll find research to support your argument," she said, "when the majority of the research is written from a gatekeeping mentality." She walked out of the office feeling frustrated, but as her hand was on the door handle, she turned around and added, "This conversation is difficult to swallow". Subsequently, there was a staff hospitality training session where the program manager opened by narrating a story involving an unidentified female faculty member who had acted "inappropriately", without revealing the full context. Ching-Ching suspected that she was the reference, even though her name was not mentioned. After that, she felt her behavior was being closely monitored.

Upon completing the training, Ching-Ching was required to have weekly meetings with the Assistant Director, a requirement not imposed on her colleagues. At the end of the semester, she had a meeting with the Program Director, who, in a rather condescending manner, noted that her behavior had "improved," without explicitly addressing the incident. This unresolved incident continued to haunt her for years, even after leaving the company. She often wonders if she could have handled the situation differently— perhaps with more composure or by choosing silence.

In retrospect, she realizes that her feelings of anger and frustration stem from seeing her own struggles reflected in her students' challenges. She deeply resonates with their emotions because she has walked a similar path. She understands that their difficulties are embedded in a sociopolitical environment that prioritizes English supremacy, often at the expense of recognizing students as holistic human beings with complex, dynamic language practices. It is disheartening for her to know that for some students, these decisions carry financial repercussions that exacerbate their already strained situations.

4.2.2 Lan's Story

Similar to Ching-Ching who came to the US as an international student to pursue her graduate program studies, the second author, Lan, was also an international student. Her transnational trajectory started in China where she was born and raised. She completed her K-16 education in China, earned her BA degree in English Literature and Language, and a master's certificate in English Education. Her parents, who both were university professors, instilled in her a passion for education. Thus she had eight years of ELT experience at the university level in China before coming to the US to further her education as an international student. After earning her master's in Applied Linguistics and ESL and then her doctorate in Composition and TESOL at two different universities in the US, she found her first job in the English Department at a public university located in Western New York. In addition to teaching mainstream courses, Lan taught different English courses, both undergraduate and graduate, to international students for almost three years. There, she earned first-hand teaching and administrative experiences of working with MLLs, which enabled her to find her second job at the current university, a historically black college and university (HBCU), where she established and directed the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program and concurrently teaches in the English Department. In the English Department, she is the only non-native English-speaking faculty with a TESOL background.

Reflecting on her transnational trajectory from an international student, a MLL to becoming a language program director and an English faculty, she also has tangled stories mixed with frustration and success. She has experienced linguistic barriers, cultural challenges, racial and gender disempowerment, emotional labor even during her current faculty experience as a non-native colored female from the Global South teaching in the Global North. Navigating through the vicissitudes of her journey and status, she learned to adjust herself and adapt to Western academia and be resilient especially when facing challenges. Her strategies for resilience have taught her to empathize, navigate, negotiate, and internalize under different circumstances and develop as a transnational pracademic in a "sociocultural in-betweenness" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 3) in US higher education.

Growing up in China, a collectivist society, Chinese culture and values, such as respecting others, being humble, and working hard greatly influence Lan's thoughts and behaviors. She expresses her overwhelmed feelings by observing the differences between the educational systems in the US and in China both as a formal MLL and a current faculty member in the US, although she values the opportunity to work at a US institution. Being a non-native English-speaker, she always tries her best to perform in order to prove that she is an asset to her institution. For example, from establishing the brand-new ESL program in an unfamiliar institutional setting to leading the program for almost seven years as an Asian woman, she sometimes wondered whether her native English-speaking colleagues would accept leadership from someone with a different cultural and linguistic background. With this concern and influenced by her

sociocultural identity, her leadership style was leading but participatory, not authoritative. She constantly reflected on her leadership performance, trying to see if she could have done better.

However, her modest attitude toward people and hard-working attitude toward job sometimes disadvantaged her as some of her upper-level colleagues seemed to delegitimize her leadership role as an Asian female (Kim et al., 2001), especially when some administrators who were outsiders of ELT, but tried to manipulate or intervene in the ESL program. As a language program director, she had to negotiate with these administrators who are not familiar with language teaching and learning when making decisions. Due to different understanding of what a language program is, some of her suggestions were challenged, which undermined her legitimacy as the ESL program director. For example, without discussing with or informing Lan ahead of time, an administrator for students' affairs named one of her subordinates as the ESL program coordinator in charge of ESL students' activities. Lan was surprised when receiving an email from this coordinator with a schedule of activities for her ESL students to participate. This unexpected situation heightened her awareness of the unequal power dynamics within the organization that contributes to the marginalization of the minoritized community.

The power dynamics persisted even after she transitioned into a faculty position within the English department following the closure of the ESL program. In the English Department, as the only non-native Asian female who teaches language pedagogy courses among those native English-speaking faculty who are experts about English and American literature, Lan often feels alone, even marginalized. For example, her emails are often ignored by her white male chair, and she is forgotten to be informed to attend the departmental meetings multiple times. Her class observations scheduled with the Chair were either forgotten by him or she could not get the observation reports back from him timely. Such incidents and similar experiences that many non-native instructors have make her feel frustrated, but also made her ponder whether her Asian female status is not appreciated by or that they attempt to demonstrate their power over a non-native female in the English native-speaker dominant department. Lan noticed the challenges that minority and female professionals often face (Hanasono et al., 2020; Hune, 2011; Lippi-Green, 2012); the challenges imposed by the traditional US higher education setting, include unequal power relationships, English-native ideology, and colleagues' unfamiliarity and ignorance about non-native English-speakers.

When facing these incidents, Lan always chooses to refrain from expressing her true feelings, hiding her vulnerability and trying to appear unaffected but with a positive attitude because sadly, emotional labor, which often leaves people uncomfortable and vulnerable feelings, is commonly considered not being academic enough and professionals are not expected to express their emotions in institutional contexts (see Song, 2016; Zambylas, 2003). Lan's reactions to these experiences are self-doubt, self-negate first. She also constantly asks herself if she has done anything wrong. Even

though Lan was wronged, she chose to relinquish herself for the greater good of others. But doing so requires emotional sacrifices. She is emotionally laden, weak, and vulnerable.

Years of working in US higher education as well as her emotional sacrifice and vulnerability have taught her the importance of negotiation and resilience through mutual understanding and learning. Lan has learned to appreciate negotiating for fairness and the legitimacy of her positionality (Yazan et al., 2023). She is also willing to take feedback, reflect, learn, and grow, which in turn has benefited her. Her adaptability allows her to be able to adjust to various circumstances in order to fit in and develop in Western academia. Based on her experiences, she believes mutual understanding and prompt communication in a professional setting are crucial, but they require all parties' efforts. In other words, a healthy, equal, and inclusive humanizing educational landscape depends on joint efforts from everyone, no matter if one is from the Global South or the Global North.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 How can an Asset-Based Approach to SEL Reveal the Complexity of Emotions, Highlighting their Role in Shaping a Rich Inner Life and the Underlying Narrative of "Why"?

Through the lens of an asset-based approach to SEL, our autoethnographic explorations underscore the integral role of emotions in shaping the multifaceted narratives of our lives as MLLs and ELT professionals. By adopting a dynamic perspective on emotion, we illuminate the profound complexity of emotions, highlighting their essential contribution to our rich inner lives.

Throughout our respective journeys, our emotions have intertwined deeply with our personal and professional identities; each shade of emotion reveals a layer of our experiences. In our narrative accounts, we strive to uncover the "why" behind the complexity of our emotional responses. For instance, Ching-Ching's reactions to the homogeneous student body within her ESL program stem from her early experiences of isolation and inferiority during her initial years in the US. Having undergone a similar journey, she holds a unique insight into what her students endure. Recognizing that these challenges arose from policies rooted in assimilation and neoliberalism, she is acutely aware of the injustices faced by her students. Similarly, Lan's experiences with her international students reflect her struggles when some administrators above her imposed unreasonable demands on the ESL program she directed.

By adopting an asset-based approach, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex dimensions of our responses, rooted in our personal histories. Consequently, our experiences and reactions stand in stark contrast to those of our non-multilingual

colleagues. These critical incidents not only paint the emotional landscapes of our inner lives, but also provide a unique vantage point for examining and understanding the structural and systemic forces at play.

Our stories emphasize the importance of shifting perspectives. By adopting an asset-based view, we have sought to adapt our teaching to empowering our students, especially our racially, culturally, and linguistically minoritized MLLs, breaking free from the restrictive confines of traditional ELT structures. We have taken ownership of our emotions, leveraging them to gain insights into power dynamics and broader social structures that shape our environments. By embracing the richness of our emotional experiences, we challenge the often oversimplified, deficit-oriented narratives surrounding emotions facing MLLs, thereby deepening our understanding of both ourselves and the systemic forces at work.

5.2 In What Ways can an Asset-Based Approach to SEL Move beyond the Neoliberal Focus on Soft Skills and Academic Outcomes, to Instead Appreciate Emotions as Integral to Human Life—Where They can Act as Forms of Resistance, Responses to Power Structures, and Expressions of Vulnerability that Underscore Our Shared Humanity?

Our autoethnographic explorations illuminate the transformative potential of asset-based approaches to SEL, which move beyond the dominant paradigm's focus on cultivating soft skills for academic and economic success. By recognizing emotions as fundamental to the human experience, we demonstrate how they can serve as potent tools for critically responding to social structures and expressing vulnerability, thereby emphasizing our shared humanity. This perspective also allows for a more critical examination of systemic issues.

We challenge the deficit-based view of emotions, and more importantly, critique the current practices in ELT for MLLs. Our findings suggest that when SEL is framed through an asset-based lens, emotions are no longer sidelined as mere contributors to productivity but are instead seen as essential to understanding the complex historical and social conditions that MLLs navigate in their language learning and teaching— conditions significantly shaped by the global power dynamics of English.

Ching-Ching's discomfort within a non-diverse ESL program and her reaction to the use of standardized tests to evaluate MLLs' complex language practices were not merely personal responses. Rather, they were critical reactions to systemic issues of representation and ethics in educational policies. Her emotions sparked a deeper inquiry into the institutional practices that sustain such unjust policies and environments. Lan's emotional response to discriminatory behaviors from her

supervisor highlighted broader issues of workplace power inequality. While her non-multilingual colleagues might have overlooked or accepted such behaviors, Lan's emotional reaction became a form of resistance, challenging the status quo and advocating for a more equitable and inclusive work environment.

Our collective experiences illustrate that emotions in SEL should not be reduced to tools for behavior management or academic performance improvement. Instead, they should be recognized as integral to the complexity of the human experience—offering critical insights into the social and power structures that shape our lives. Moreover, they serve as a mirror for the ELT field and the broader educational system to engage in self-reflection and critique.

5.3 How can an Asset-Based Approach to SEL Demonstrate the Power of Emotions as Catalysts for Social Change, Driving Agency, Voice, and Social Action?

Our autoethnographic narratives reveal that an asset-based approach to SEL not only acknowledges the power of emotions, but also harnesses them as catalysts for social change, driving agency, voice, and collective action. Through reflective practices, emotions become rich resources for criticality, offering alternative perspectives that challenge existing systems and inspire transformative change.

Our stories illustrate that when emotions are legitimized and viewed as assets rather than deficits, they provide the foundation for meaningful social action. Ching-Ching's emotional responses to her program's unjust practice in student recruitment, instructional practices, language assessment could have been framed within a deficit perspective, leading to feelings of frustration or inadequacy. However, by validating her emotions and recognizing them as legitimate insights into the experiences of minoritized students, she gains insight into the systemic oppression embedded within educational structures. This recognition fueled her determination to advocate for social change, highlighting the role of emotions in awakening a critical consciousness that challenges inequitable systems.

Our experiences and reflections highlight the transformative power of an asset-based approach to SEL, where emotions are not just personal experiences but intertwined with broader social dynamics. Both of our experiences emphasize that the burden of change should not fall solely on marginalized communities; instead, the system itself must be willing to evolve. Our reflections offer a roadmap for creating social change—one that starts by embracing and empowering the emotional experiences of those marginalized within the system.

6. DISCUSSION

While emotions are often perceived as monolithic, fixed, and static. They are modularized and contrasted with reason in ways that reflect the behavioral norms of dominant groups (Borowski, 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2014; Hoffman, 2009). Our narratives reveal a different truth. Our collective story demonstrates that to truly tap into the rich emotional resources of MLLs and leverage them to foster critical awareness among educational stakeholders and enact social change, it is essential to understand the underlying causes of these emotions. Recognizing that emotions are social constructs embedded within complex power structures calls for a fundamental shift in our pedagogical practices, moving toward co-learning both within the classroom and beyond.

6.1 Recognizing the Power Dynamics within SEL

Through our autoethnographic exploration and reflections, we have come to understand how our emotions have empowered us and driven us toward equity in both our teaching and research. This insight compels us to challenge prevailing SEL practices, where emotions are often treated as monolithic and are contrasted with reason, reflecting the behavioral norms of dominant groups. Although some emotions can indeed be self-destructive, it is crucial to recognize that emotions, as social constructs, are frequently employed as tools of regulation and social control, obscuring the social inequities that shape the experiences of marginalized individuals (Drake & Oglesby, 2020; Jagers et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021).

Understanding emotion necessitates acknowledging its sociopolitical dimensions, which are deeply intertwined with our shared humanity (Fanon, 1996; Hoffman, 2009). SEL cannot be effectively implemented without mutual recognition and co-learning. It is essential to move beyond viewing emotions merely as individualized skills and to appreciate how they are shaped by and respond to social contexts. For SEL to truly promote equity, it must incorporate an understanding of these dynamics, recognizing the diverse emotional experiences of marginalized communities and addressing the systemic inequities that underpin them. This requires creating spaces where all forms of emotional expression are valued, and the emotional labor of marginalized individuals is acknowledged and respected. Only through such an inclusive approach can SEL foster genuine understanding, empathy, and transformative change.

6.2 Fostering Shared Humanity

Comparing our experiences as non-native English-speaking ELT professionals in an English-speaking dominant environment with our current exploration of the role of emotions in our professional lives as well as reflecting on these experiences help deepen

our understanding of ourselves. We feel a strong obligation to speak out. We are also mindful of our privilege and the platform we have to share our stories. We strive to speak from a place of humility, recognizing that our emotions have provided profound insights into ourselves and our relationships with others. Emotions are never purely individual; they are always relational and connected to broader contexts. They reflect deeper dimensions of our being that may not be fully understood at the moment.

SEL can play a crucial role in shaping an equitable educational environment, particularly for marginalized student populations. Teachers should approach student emotional outbursts as critical incidents or teachable moments, offering valuable opportunities to explore the hidden dimensions of school curricula, social dynamics, and our shared humanity (Barton & Tan, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Openly sharing and discussing emotions, as our experiences have taught us, serves as a foundation for community building and mutual understanding in the classroom and beyond.

To truly honor our shared humanity, teachers should create spaces where they can share their experiences of navigating power dynamics and boundaries within the classroom. It is equally important to acknowledge our own fallibility and complicity within the system, inviting all stakeholders to engage in a collective journey of co-learning. By openly addressing the entangled nature of emotions and power dynamics, teachers can cultivate inclusive learning environments that validate and explore the diverse emotional landscapes of their students.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS: AN ASSET-BASED AND CO-LEARNING APPROACH TO SEL

Creating a transformative, equity-based educational environment for marginalized MLLs requires systematic change, and SEL can play an integral role in driving this transformation. Achieving this begins with small but meaningful steps.

7.1 Shift Towards an Asset-Based Perspective

Shifting towards an asset-based view of emotions involves recognizing students' emotions as legitimate responses and forms of rational discourse (Barton & Tan, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Instead of perceiving emotions as counterproductive or deficit-based, we should celebrate them as reflections of the richness and diversity of human experiences. This shift entails validating students' emotional expressions and exploring the underlying rationality that informs their feelings.

7.2 Challenge Academic Discourse Exclusivity

To confront the exclusivity and oppressive effects of traditional academic discourse, which often adheres to narrow definitions of propriety and reason, we must expand and embrace inclusive language and expressive practices within the school curriculum (Paris & Alim, 2014). Moving beyond compartmentalized notions of SEL and academic performance, it is crucial to avoid approaches that focus solely on academic success without addressing the underlying social justice issues (Barton & Tan, 2020; Lin et al., 2023). Asset based mindsets should be integrated into all aspects of learning, not treated as a separate discipline. This integration includes critically examining the school community and advocating for an environment that fosters inclusive language and multimodality, recognizing that emotions often require alternative forms of expression outside normalized academic discourse.

7.3 Incorporate Storytelling and Dialogue

This integration can be achieved through storytelling and dialogue that center students' narratives and perspectives, incorporating diverse viewpoints into classroom conversations and beyond (Lin et al., 2023). By exploring the dynamic depth of students' emotions through storytelling and fostering constructive dialogue, we can uncover the complex dimensions of their experiences and harness these insights as valuable resources for collective learning. Although this approach has been widely recognized and practiced in SEL (Pentón Herrera, 2020), it often operates within a normative view of emotion that can function as a hidden curriculum. To make SEL truly empowering and transformative, discussions about emotion must also engage with issues of social justice and the underlying power structures in society.

8. LIMITATION

The strength of this study also presents a limitation. While we address a critical gap in the existing literature by critiquing SEL's lack of nuance, its deficit perspective toward MLLs, and its potential for dehumanization, our study primarily draws on our personal experiences as multilingual professionals. We explore how our rich inner emotional lives inspire social change and inform our perspectives on SEL. However, due to the limited scale of our study, we acknowledge the need for more extensive empirical research—such as interviews with a broader range of multilingual learners and professionals—to build a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the emotional lives of MLLs and their implications for an asset-based approach to SEL. While considerable groundwork has been laid through the use of autoethnography and narrative inquiry in exploring multilingual learners' and teachers' identities, we see potential for a more systematic

study to further investigate these implications for SEL. However, given the scope of this paper, such studies remain an area for future exploration.

9. CONCLUSION

In this study, we, two non-native English-speaking women in ELT embarked on a collaborative autoethnographic exploration to uncover the multi-dimensional, often concealed, or suppressed aspects of their emotional lives, aiming to examine the current paradigm of SEL and its implications, particularly for MLLs. We navigated critical perspectives such as post-colonial theories and emotional labor to gain insight into this complex topic.

As SEL has emerged as a prominent paradigm in ELT, we aimed to both complicate and expand the current approaches where SEL is viewed as individual skill development through our collaborative autoethnography, viewing emotion as the untapped, hidden dimension of our intellectual lives and rich resources to unlock our passion and drive for social change. Based on our study, we advocate for SEL to adopt the form of a journey; a journey of co-learning within the school community. This approach recognizes the interdependence of individuals within a learning community and emphasizes the importance of mutual learning and understanding. By embracing co-learning, SEL can better recognize and harness the emotional resources of MLLs, empowering them and fostering authentic personal and intellectual growth. This, in turn, enables SEL to play a crucial role in our collective efforts toward achieving true equity.

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